



Department
for Education

Norfolk County Council Special Free School

**Contextual information for
applicant groups applying to
open a new Special Free School**

Norfolk County Council

July 2023

OVERVIEW

The Department for Education is inviting applications from proposer groups to open a new special free school in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.

Applicant groups can access the key school specification information, along with the full 'How to Apply' guidance. You should read these documents carefully before completing mandatory pre-registration.

The school specification document sets out the key factual details about the proposed school, including the proposed size, SEND designation, age range, suggested top-up funding, and proposed site.

This document provides applicant groups with additional contextual information provided by Norfolk County Council which includes:

- The rationale, context and need for the school;
- Details on the commissioning of places, including the involvement of any other LAs commissioning places;
- A brief description of the existing provision in the area;
- Future expected growth in pupil numbers; and
- How the LA expects places within the school to be filled.

RATIONALE, CONTEXT AND NEED FOR THE SCHOOL, INCLUDING PROPOSED COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS

The opening of a new special free school for children with learning disabilities in Great Yarmouth is a critical element of Norfolk's broader plans to transform local provision for children and young people with SEND as part of Norfolk's "Local First Inclusion" strategy. A link to an overview of Local First Inclusion, as well as Norfolk's wider Learning Strategy is included in the accompanying specification document.

Local First Inclusion, with associated investment from the Department for Education under its Safety Valve agreement, provides a unique opportunity to re-shape Norfolk's landscape of provision, prioritising a direction of travel which will see:

- Children's needs met locally
- Children's needs met earlier
- Children's needs met more holistically

Following a comprehensive sufficiency analysis conducted in 2018, NCC identified a range of gaps in local specialist provision, as well as additional challenges regarding capacity of mainstream schools to support children local to their communities. In response, NCC invested £120m into the development of new capital ventures to address its shortfall in both unit and state funded special school provision; accompanying a broader SEND and Alternative Provision Transformation Programme centred upon increasing capacity within the mainstream sector to support more complex children.

The aims of this programme have been to reduce reliance on high-cost independent sector provision, within the context of Norfolk as an outlier in respect of % of children with EHCPs placed within independent sector, (i.e., the overall % of Norfolk C&YP within special (state-funded + independent) at 47% is comparable to national, however, Norfolk's ratio of independent placements within this overall cohort is substantially higher).

As a result of this investment to date, three new special schools and ten new specialist resource bases within mainstream schools have opened. This new school in Great

Yarmouth complements a substantial wider strategy where provision within mainstream schools is the cornerstone. However, there remains specific need within the east of Norfolk to address the increased volume of children with significant levels of special educational needs which, if left unaddressed, will continue to see Norfolk remaining reliant on the more costly independent sector or needing to transport children significant distance from their local communities to attend a school which meets their needs at considerable unnecessary cost.

The over-reliance on high cost/lower quality independent sector provision is overwhelmingly the main reason behind Norfolk's historic and current High Needs Block deficit. Our Local First Inclusion strategy is underpinned by a plan to reduce independent sector places from just over 900 currently to just over 100 in 6 years' time. This new special school, within our current sufficiency strategy must be delivered to enable our strategic plans to be successful.

Following the creation of new provisions over this period, the sufficiency analysis was refreshed in 2021 to determine impact and current gaps and needs. The analysis identified an ongoing reliance on independent sector provision, reflecting the large upturn in demand for specialist provision arising from the 2014 SEND reforms and the emphasis on parental right and entitlement to the school of their choice. As new provisions had only just opened, and with an emerging transformative strategy surrounding Alternative Provision and specialist SEMH provision, the sufficiency analysis determined it was too early to reach conclusions on the full impact of the new provision on the overall landscape. However, it did identify specific new gaps for provision for children with complex learning disabilities within the East of the county.

The analysis identified a 170% increase (24 to 65) in need for special school provision in the Great Yarmouth area between 2018 and 2021, which could not be absorbed from the existing school in the local area. Additionally, analysis revealed a further 40 children travelling from Great Yarmouth to Cromer / Sheringham on the north Norfolk coast in lieu of a more local special school, as well as a further 20 children travelling from Great Yarmouth to schools in Suffolk.

This new special free school will cater for pupils who have a primary need of learning disability, ranging from moderate to severe but principally for children who are

operating within the 1st centile and under range of cognitive functioning. In addition, these pupils will also have co-occurring secondary needs which present a significant barrier to learning and overall progress and attainment including physical disabilities, hearing, visual or multi-sensory impairments, speech and language needs, autism, and social, emotional and mental health needs.

The new school will enable the LA to meet its stated ambition of “Local First” by offering a state funded school place for children in the eastern area, reducing both the time and cost associated with transporting children outside of Yarmouth.

The school will be the second of its type in the Great Yarmouth area, joining John Grant School, and a fraternity of 16 state funded special schools throughout Norfolk, of which 13 cater for the same categories of SEND. The school will complement the existing provision by meeting the identified short fall of places in Yarmouth increasing the pressure for places at existing schools, particularly John Grant, where capacity is now at its limit. It will also complement a developing picture of unit provision in the local area, particularly the planned initiation of secondary MLD bases which will enable the LA to plan for local placements more strategically rather than being reliant only on when and where places become available.

Places at the school will be commissioned by Norfolk County Council and the new school is accounted for within the overall pupil profile trajectory of HNB allocations set out within the Dedicated Schools Grant recovery plan with the DfE. The pupil profiling also demonstrates the forecasted impact of this school upon the area, with greater proportions of children attending mainstream, unit or state funded provision and a substantial reduction in those attending independent settings.

Norfolk DSG Recovery Movement in Placements

Unmitigated placements:

Placement numbers by type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Maintained/Academy/Free Special Schools	2,049	2,148	2,244	2,325	2,335	2,335	2,335
Independent Special Schools	909	959	1,009	1,059	1,109	1,159	1,209
Add/Other Provisions	205	245	285	325	365	405	445
Medical Needs/Hospital Provision	84	20	20	20	20	20	20
Personal Budgets	82	87	92	97	102	107	112
Section 19 Placements and Support^	157	157	157	157	157	157	157
Alternative Provision	110	114	114	114	114	114	114
Post-16 (Further Education)	764	786	810	834	859	885	911
Specialist Resource Bases & Deaf Resource Bases	420	467	528	574	592	592	592
Short Stay Schools	432	432	432	432	432	432	432
Other Local Authority Re-couplement	96	105	114	123	132	141	150
Total Placement Numbers	5,308	5,520	5,805	6,060	6,217	6,347	6,477
Mainstream EHCP & funded SEN support	4,154	4,327	4,434	4,496	4,522	4,502	4,474
Total	9,462	9,847	10,239	10,556	10,739	10,849	10,951

Mitigated placements:

Placement numbers by type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Maintained/Academy/Free Special Schools	2,049	2,128	2,188	2,233	2,317	2,347	2,369
Independent Special Schools	909	946	820	599	344	119	108
Add/Other Provisions	205	187	170	153	136	119	100
Medical Needs/Hospital Provision	84	20	20	20	20	20	20
Personal Budgets	82	83	84	85	86	87	86
Section 19 Placements and Support^	157	139	122	105	88	71	52
Alternative Provision	110	110	103	96	89	82	76
Post-16 (Further Education)	764	781	796	712	629	546	464
Specialist Resource Bases & Deaf Resource Bases	420	530	717	970	1,132	1,132	1,132
Short Stay Schools	432	432	432	432	432	432	432
Other Local Authority Re-couplement	96	94	83	72	61	50	40
Total Placement Numbers	5,308	5,450	5,535	5,477	5,334	5,006	4,879
Mainstream EHCP & funded SEN support	4,154	4,330	4,385	4,445	4,496	4,562	4,693
Total	9,462	9,780	9,920	9,922	9,830	9,568	9,572

NCC has a track-record of co-production commissioning with the Norfolk Association of Special Schools (NASSH) to support mainstream inclusion; NASSH leaders act as specialist partners for our Specialist Resource Base mainstream unit model and through an outreach offer known as 'S2S'. The structure of these services, funded by both a small charge to mainstream schools and a c. £199,000 annual contribution from the High Needs Block and Early Years funding, drawing on the range of expertise from the full special school estate, means that the schools can deliver outreach that considers and meets individual pupil need, whole school leadership, management and training needs as well as catering for the geographical spread of the circa 450 mainstream schools in Norfolk. This school would support mainstream schools in its geographical catchment in partnership with its NASSH fraternity.

Our ambition for the new school is that it will enable another Good/Outstanding special school to be developed in Norfolk meeting current and future need of children and young people with SEND whilst also, explicitly, contributing to our HNB recovery plan within our final safety valve submission.

As more schools improve their ability to make high quality special educational provision as part of their whole school approach, the needs of more children will be met from the local offer with less requirement for the local authority to arrange SEN provision through an EHC plan or through specialist provision.

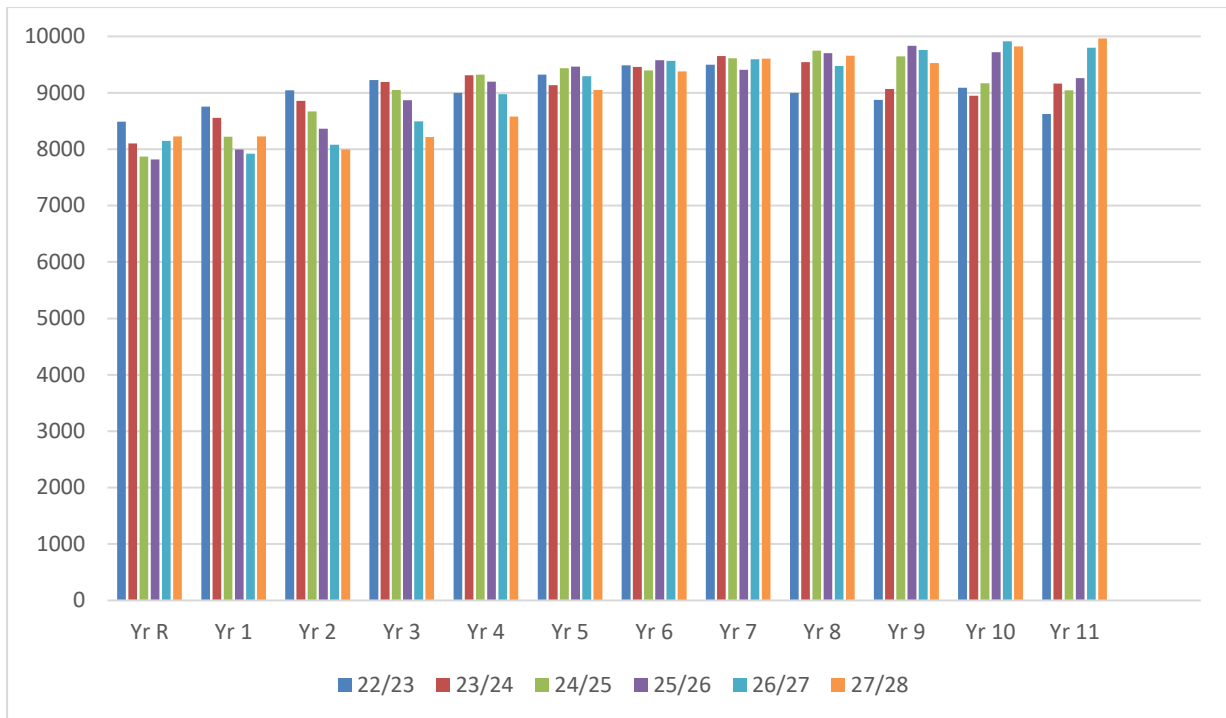
EXISTING PROVISION, EXPECTED FUTURE GROWTH IN PUPIL NUMBERS, AND HOW PLACES IN THE NEW SCHOOL WILL BE FILLED

Norfolk's SEND landscape reflects a graduated approach comprising:

- SEND provision available across its 650+ mainstream schools, colleges and early years providers supported by additional facilities, resources and funding from the LA;
- Units / Resourced provisions across 32 primary and secondary mainstream schools, across 5 categories of need (ASD, MLD, HI, SLCN, SEMH)
- 16 state funded special schools – 11 of which (including this new school once open) support a primary need of learning disability (with a range of co-morbid secondary needs such as PD, ASD, SLCN, SEMH, HI/VI/MSI, PMLD etc); 3 for a primary need of SEMH (with 2 schools being residential); and 2 for a primary need of ASD where pupils have generally average cognitive ability.
- Two Alternative Provision Academies, (comprising centres dispersed across the county), delivering education to pupils who have been permanently excluded or who without it would not receive suitable, full-time education.

In addition to the above, Norfolk has 15 independent schools and 1 independent post 16 specialist provider within its borders and a number in neighbouring local authorities where children are regularly placed; historically/currently these placements have been due to a lack of state-funded special school capacity.

Norfolk's overall school age population is expected to increase marginally by 0.24% between 2021 and 2028. However, when those totals are broken down by age range, the picture becomes more nuanced with a reduction of children in the lower age ranges, an evening in the mid age ranges and a larger % increase in the upper age ranges (which will transpose into post 16).



When applying the pupil cohort to those with EHCPs, initial trajectory data based on analysis of historical trends indicated the following:

- Norfolk’s EHCP population would be projected to grow to 11,432 by 2027 and 13,033 by 2032. Population grows through the entire period of the projection but slowing from 11.9% year on year in 2022 to 1.8% by 2032;
- Numbers of children with a primary need of ASD and SEMH would increase significantly until 2032, followed by SLCN and MLD;
- Norfolk’s population of EHCP children in post 16 FE settings would increase dramatically to approximately 4,300 by 2032;
- Numbers in mainstream schools would increase to around 2600 in 2026 before levelling out and slightly reducing to 2032;
- Numbers in state funded special would increase markedly between 2020-2024 before levelling out at the 2500 range;
- Numbers in independent settings would grow to just under 1000 in 2027 before levelling out.

This analysis, being based on population data and historical patterns, sets out the expected picture of demand in the EHCP system without any shift in the strategic direction of SEND. Norfolk’s “Local First Inclusion” strategy sets out a significantly

different picture of placements of children and young people, with the plan focussed on a substantial reduction of children and young people in the independent sector.

Additionally, a substantial analysis of demand for special school provision based on requests for such arising from parental preference or where mainstream schools confirm they were not able to meet children's needs within Annual Reviews, was undertaken looking at the academic years 2018-19 to 2021-22. This revealed that:

- Requests for special school places had risen by 33% over the period
- For the children referred in a given academic year, the LA was only able to secure placements in on average 70% of the cohort referred.
- This resulted in an increasing number of children needing a special school place that the LA was unable to provide.
- Unmet need for places within the county were in the main population areas of Norwich, Kings Lynn and Thetford with a significant volume in Great Yarmouth.
- Tribunals for complex needs special school places continued to rise significantly, 46 in 2017-18 to 146 in 20-21, with appeals for places at John Grant School in Yarmouth doubling in a 2-year period.
- The anticipated new demand in Great Yarmouth could not be met by the expansion of existing provision alone and, without a new school, Norfolk would continue to be disproportionately reliant on the independent sector to meet its needs.

It is expected therefore that this new school in Great Yarmouth will be fully commissioned to its maximum capacity with a combination of pupils who:

- Are resident in the local community who would need to travel further afield to access a special school that is suitable to their SEND;
- Those who would otherwise enter the independent sector, including at such significant distance it would require them to board at the school further dislocating them from their local communities
- Those living in the local community who may return from settings further afield including those in out of county provisions

- Those in Alternative Provision which is not suitable for their needs, including those in receipt of Education other than at School packages
- Children arriving newly to the local area who either had or required a special school place in their previous area.

Norfolk County Council will work with the successful Academy Trust in the arrangements for admissions of pupils which will be planned during the growth phase in response to the relative demand at the time. The specified numbers of children detailed in each Key stage for placements may therefore be subject to alteration and will reflect the children's age ranges on opening of the school and during the growth phase. All admissions will be made in accordance with the duties placed on local authorities for naming schools in EHCPs under Section 39 Children and Families Act and associated regulations and statutory guidance.

The Local Authority will also work with the successful Academy Sponsor where the needs of pupils require adjustments and differentiation to the school's core offer or approach, again based on the relative demand in the system and the presenting needs of children to whom the Local Authority owes duties to arrange the special educational provision set out in their EHCP.