

## **New Special School Sponsor Event – Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May**

### **Q&A Session**

All information will be made available the Hertfordshire County Council website, new special school webpage as soon as possible.

**Question:** When will the LA provide details on the anticipated top funding that will be provided as this is needed to inform sponsor proposals and applications?

**Answer:** Details will be provided on the HCC website along with a summary of Q&As.

**Question:** You want the special school to improve outcomes, attendance and reduce exclusions. What are the current rates and what are you looking to reduce them by?

**Answer:** We want this new provision to be able to provide something different for these young people at risk of exclusion and home education so that they stay in education. Rather than indicate a specific target, we will make a report available to download that contains this type of background information. It's titled 'The summative report from sub group 1' and can be found on the new special school webpage of the Hertfordshire website.

**Question:** Would it be possible to organise a specific engagement event, where sponsors can speak on an individual basis with local parent groups, social care and multi-agency groups so that we're able to put together a bid that really speaks to everyone and make sure we're getting everything we need?

**Answer:** That's a great idea. We will facilitate some community engagement and invite people to be part of that in a timely way and we'll let everyone that attended here today know but we'll also put it on our website

New Schools Network said that both the DfE and the LA will expect to see some evidence of community engagement, I think if you can do that in one forum, it's a good idea.

**Question:** What is the timescale for applications and implementation; when will the school open?

**Answer:** The deadline for the application is 30<sup>th</sup> September. The duration of the pre-opening phase varies but is typically, around 3 years. The County Council will be making the Woodside Centre in Welwyn Garden City available for the new school but it is for the DfE to decide if it wants to refurbish those premises or to start afresh and build a new provision and that will dictate some of the timescales. As soon as we get some clarity on that, we will update our website, hopefully within the next few weeks.

**Question:** Is there an established special school network already and do they work closely with mainstreams schools as well?

**Answer:** Yes there is and they also work closely as a collective schools group including a half termly, special schools forum that provide an opportunity for networking and talking about the various things that are going on.

A special school head added that the schools work very closely with the LA and the current special school provision review involves a number of head teachers in different sub-groups working together so there quite is a tight network and a lot of collaborative work taking place currently

**Question:** Is there a commitment from Health in terms of health professionals and commissioning of health services as it sounds like it would be a school that would require considerable support in that area?

**Answer:** The County council is working with our health commissioners and providers as part of the overarching transformation of SEND and CAMHS in Hertfordshire, 'how we can develop a better support network.' We don't have a blueprint for what that looks like at the moment, that is a work in progress, but our commissioners, senior leadership across health, the county council and other professionals are committed to a more collective approach.

**Question:** As the school is centrally located in Welwyn Garden City would students come from all across the county?

**Answer:** Yes although we have quality provision in another part of the county so we would hope to avoid transporting the young people across the length and breadth of Hertfordshire.

**Question:** Would transport be provided?

**Answer:** If the school is the nearest suitable school and the distance from home to school is over the statutory walking distance of more than 3 miles (4,827metres) from home for pupils over 8 years old, they will be eligible for free home to school transport. For full details, see Hertfordshire's Home to School Transport Policy at: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/schools-and-education/school-admissions/home-to-school-transport/school-transport-send/school-transport-for-pupils-with-special-educational-needs-or-disabilities.aspx>

**Question:** Some of the descriptions you talked about the young people wanting a safe place where they can be themselves - is that not possible within mainstream?

**Answer:** There's a description of the level of need in the county council's bid. These young people have complex needs haven't been met, either in mainstream or in our special schools so it's those with really quite severe mental health difficulties, autism, possibly challenging behaviour because of the barriers to learning.

**Question:** What kind of evidence is there around how young people with mental health issues and complex autistic issues can co-exist and integrate on one site?

**Answer:** This is an issue that all our SEMH schools and mainstream schools face. It's important to stress that we are not necessarily looking at two separate groups of young people, often autism is underlying their mental health conditions and their mental health conditions have impacted on them in such a way that typical autism strategies don't work. A more holistic approach is required, rather than addressing their specific diagnosis which means the provision will need to be more bespoke and flexible.

In addition to support from CAMHS, we have a specialist service in Hertfordshire called PALMS (Positive behaviour, Autism, Learning disability and mental health Service) which is like a Tier 3 CAMHS service for young people with autism and/or learning difficulties and mental health issues who would be closely involved.

In their applications, sponsors will need to demonstrate how they would envisage meeting the needs of those different groups. To help with that, we will arrange an event for potential applicants to get together with some of the community and agencies working in Hertfordshire, PALMS would be one of the key groups to make sure they're around the table.

As an aside, we're currently putting in an application under the Department of Health trailblazers around mental health and we've already got one application through which was around working with schools more generally in Hertfordshire in 2 particular areas but the next wave we're very much focusing on children with SEND and working with PALMS to put together a bid that will support our special schools including any free school that develops over time, so just to put that in context but I think we will need to involve CAMHS in our future stakeholder events.

**Question:** Just a few more questions about the type of student, just to be clear. We're seeing quite a lot of referrals for children with underlying personality disorders – is that going to be something that you're going to be looking at?

**Answer:** Look at the bid and the report that we're going to be published on our website. You'll see it includes data that shows we've got a continuing rise in pupils with a primary need of SEMH and ASC in the primary sector and; a steady rise in pupils with ASC as a primary need in the secondary sector and; a more significant rise in those identified with a primary need of SEMH since 2015.

### **Next Steps**

We will arrange a further stakeholder event where we bring together community groups and parent carers to talk to interested parties.

We will update the website with:

- information on funding
- information on pupils profiles
- Hertfordshire County Council commissioned report on specialist provision
- details on the building and opening timeframe, as soon as we have some clarity
- slides from this event, we will take that forward and make sure we get that out to you.

Thank you for your interest and look forward to hearing from you as we move forward.