

# New 60 Place Primary Special School for Children with Communication and Autism Needs

Potters Bar, Hertfordshire

Opening September 2023

Background Information and Specification



Hertfordshire County Council

April 2022



## Section A - Introduction

Under Section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the 'free school presumption') where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy.

Hertfordshire County Council has identified the need to create new special school places for children with communication and autism needs, for those which are not currently being met in Hertfordshire. This proposal is consistent with priority 4 in the SEND Special School Place Planning Strategy 2020-2023: Delivery of two new communication & autism schools to meet the needs of children whose needs fall between current special school sectors. The full strategy can be found at: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/media-library/documents/send-special-school-place-planning-strategy-pdf-4.47mb.pdf>

The county council is seeking applications from Department for Education (DfE) approved sponsors<sup>1</sup> to run the new communication and autism school, for children aged 4 – 11, with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). It is anticipated that the school will open from September 2023 and in two phases. In 2023/24, the school will provide 36 places across year groups 2, 3, 4 and 5. From 2024/25, the school will operate at full capacity, offering a total of 60 places across all primary year groups (Reception to Year 6).

The opening of a primary communication and autism school will complement the planned opening of a new 60 place secondary communication and autism special school in Welwyn Garden City. It is expected that the secondary school will also open in September 2023.

The new primary special school will form part of Hertfordshire County Council's communication and autism offer and will be part of the county council's graduated response.

The expectation is for the majority of the children with these needs to remain in their local mainstream school with support. The focus is on destination learning, developing ambition, resilience and opportunity, so that these children and young people can realise their ambitions. The aim is always for pupils to be reintegrated into a mainstream setting, where possible.

Universal and Universal plus	This is a universal offer of training for schools so that they can offer children quality first teaching and reasonable adjustments for example, quiet learning spaces, understanding learning styles,
---------------------------------	--

---

<sup>1</sup> Proposers must be DfE approved sponsors. If you are not already an approved sponsor you will need to apply separately via the formal sponsor approval process. You should contact the DfE about becoming a sponsor before submitting a proposal. You can find out more information at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sponsor-an-academy>.

	adaptive planning, enabling our children to access learning and use of special interests etc.
Targeted	Mainstream schools will need to make some adaptations to meet the child's needs, for example; social skills groups, playtime groups, later starts to avoid crowds, workstations, quiet learning spaces, exit cards, lunch time clubs, touch typing classes, special interest groups e.g. Dr Who Club, or Minecraft etc.
Targeted Plus	<p>This will involve using outside specialists such as special school outreach, advisory services, SALT.</p> <p>Creating small learning spaces within the school, special lunch times and targeted individual sessions for learning and speech.</p> <p>Support for those children with anxiety, to have a day that is certain.</p> <p>Preparation for changes and adjustments to learning.</p>
Specialist	<p><u>Adaptations and adjustments in mainstream schools</u></p> <p>Children may need additional support, as well as a micro-environment within a mainstream setting and additional support such as from a Specialist Resource Provision (SRP).</p> <p><u>Special schools</u></p> <p>Some may need a more protective environment which is where this proposed new free school for children with communication and autism needs will sit. Children with anxiety and/or demand avoidant behaviours who need more in-depth intervention will sit here.</p>
Specialist Plus	These children will often need individualised intervention to support re-engagement in learning. They will need small group learning opportunities and access to engaging and enriching academic experiences. Some of these children will attend one of the county council's two new communication and autism free schools, after an intense intervention.

## Evidence of need

The Special School Place Planning Strategy 2020-2023 explained that as of Autumn 2020, there were 15 primary aged children in independent placements whose Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) indicated they meet this need profile. There were also 19 children in Hertfordshire's primary Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) schools whose needs stemmed from their autism and associated sensory needs/difficulties in accessing learning. 3 primary aged children were receiving home tuition through Education Support for Medical Absence (ESMA), as they were unable to attend school due to their autism-related anxiety, which led to long-term school absence.

In addition to the 37 children demonstrated above, who would have benefitted from attending a setting which is better suited to their underlying needs, there were other children with this specific need in the following categories:

- children awaiting placement in specialist out of county placements;
- those currently seeking independent placements;
- those not attending school due to autism-related anxiety, but who did not meet the criteria for ESMA tuition (e.g. when Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) support is not in place / available);
- those in a mainstream or special school whose needs could have been better met in a more suitable specialist school or setting;
- Children Missing from Education (CME);
- children who were Educated at Home through Elective Home Education (EHE), as parents felt that there was not a suitable school provision available locally;
- children who have 'coped' in primary school with significant levels of intervention & support but were anticipated to struggle when reaching secondary school. Many of whom, may have benefitted from early intervention support in a specialist setting, either as a long-term placement or to better prepare them for a mainstream secondary setting.

Since Autumn 2020, the demand for primary school places for children with communication and autism needs has continued to grow, resulting in the county council's proposal to open a new 60 place primary special school from September 2023 for children with communication and autism needs.

## The proposal and how to apply

The county council is seeking proposals from appropriate DfE approved sponsors to open the new primary special school for children with communication and autism needs. The new school will be an academy (free school). Further detail is provided in the sections that follow. Related documents including the application form are available to download at:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/schools-and-education/at-school/school-planning/school-planning.aspx>

Please let us know of your intention to submit an application at the earliest possible date by emailing the Education Planning account, link below. Please return your completed application form and supporting documents by email (account below) **and** two copies by post **no later than noon on Friday 10 June 2022** to:

**Email:** [education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk) **Subject:** New Primary C&A Special School Sponsor Application

**and;**

**Post:** Hertfordshire County Council, School Planning Team,  
Postal Point CO134, Room 145, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8DN

**N.B.** If your application **exceeds 25 MB** you will need to send it via our web-based Secure File Exchange portal, HertSFX. External parties are unable to register without an 'invitation' from a HCC employee. In order to receive an invitation, please send your e-mail address to [education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk). You will receive an acknowledgement of this request together with a later prompt to register, which will contain a link, taking you through the necessary registration steps in order to use HertsFX.

## Process and timeline

25 April 2022	Specification and invitation to submit an application published
5 May 2022	Stakeholder event
<b>10 June 2022</b>	<b>Deadline for receipt of applications (by 12 noon)</b>
13 June – 8 July 2022	HCC and DfE evaluation of applications and shortlisting for interviews.
12 July 2022	Shortlisted applicants given interview details (one week notice given)
<b>20 July 2022</b>	<b>HCC Interviews of shortlisted applicants</b>
August 2022	HCC's recommendation on preferred sponsor sent to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for final decision on behalf of the Secretary of State (SoS)
September 2022	Successful sponsor appointed by the RSC on behalf of the SoS

The Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for North-West London and South-Central England on behalf of the Secretary of State will consider the county council's assessments

and recommendation before deciding which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school.

If you would like further information or wish to discuss your application, please contact:

Samantha Young	or	Stacey Tucknott
Senior Planning Officer		Planning Officer
School Planning Team		School Planning Team
Email: <a href="mailto:Samantha.Young2@hertfordshire.gov.uk">Samantha.Young2@hertfordshire.gov.uk</a>		<a href="mailto:Stacey.Tucknott@hertfordshire.gov.uk">Stacey.Tucknott@hertfordshire.gov.uk</a>
Tel: 01992 555754		01992 556308

## Primary aged pupils in Hertfordshire

The Hertfordshire countywide data below includes all Reception to Year 6 pupils at maintained schools, free schools and academies in Hertfordshire (including Education Support Centres and special schools).

Table A

### School Census Data taken from Spring 2022

Total Pupils Reception to Year 6	99917
Number Minority Ethnic Students (not White British and excluding Refused and Not Obtained)	34846
% Minority Ethnic Students (not White British and excluding Refused and Not Obtained)	34.87%
Number EAL (English as an alternative Language) (First language Not English or believed not to be English excluding Refused and Not Obtained)	18016
% EAL (English as an alternative Language) (First language Not English or believed not to be English)	18.03%
Number SEN Provision E	3191
% SEN Provision E	3.19%
Number SEN Provision K	12848
% SEN Provision K	12.86%
SEN Provision E and K	16039
% SEN E and K	16.05%
Number Eligible for FSM (at date of Census)	15654
% FSM (Free School Meals) (at date of Census)	15.67%
Number of Male Students	51108
% of Male Students	51.15%

Number of Female Students	48809
% of Female Students	48.85%

## Section B – The school

### Site / location

The proposed site for the school is located off of Field View Road, Potters Bar, EN6 2NA. The site is in county council ownership and is shown within the red boundary below. Hertfordshire County Council will deliver suitable buildings and undertake works consisting of renovating the existing building, a former school building, as well as providing additional accommodation through a newly built block.

The remainder of the site, shown within the blue boundary below, has been promoted through the Hertsmere Local Plan process by Hertfordshire County Council as a potential housing site.



The site will be made available to the academy sponsor on a 125-year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the Academies Act 2010, and any amendments having regard to the county council's title to the assets to be leased.

In order to meet the anticipated opening date of September 2023, the design process for the school building is underway. Consequently, sponsors will not have the opportunity for any significant involvement in the building design.

In line with the Hertfordshire Sustainability Strategy 2020 and the declaration of a climate emergency, the county council is working to ensure the building's design will enable the school to be, as far as possible, net zero carbon in operation. Potential sponsors will be expected to

actively engage with the county council's wider sustainability agenda, through the operation of this school and therefore should demonstrate their commitment to conforming to the net zero carbon in operation expectations in their applications.

## **Planned number of places**

The county council is proposing to open the new primary special school for children with communication and autism needs from September 2023 and in two phases. In its first year of operation, it is anticipated that the school will offer a total of 36 places across four year groups; Years 2, 3, 4 and 5. From September 2024, the number of funded places will increase from 36 to 60 and will accommodate pupils across all primary year groups (Reception to Year 6).

As with all SEND settings in Hertfordshire, the county council reviews the number of funded places annually.

## **Admissions**

Children will be placed through a local authority placement panel that will sit half termly. The admissions guidance will be in line with the county council's graduated response and will sit alongside the Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs). Panel members will consist of SEND Headteachers, SRP Leads, Advisory Teachers, Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language therapists.

### Pupil profile:

- children from across the county with communication and autism needs, who require access to a curriculum in line with their peers in mainstream;
- children that are working at, or above, age related expectations (ARE);
- children who experience barriers to their learning that may be linked to high anxiety and a feeling of difference resulting in an inability to access learning in a mainstream setting;
- children who may show behaviours that are challenging as a result of their needs, ranging from disengagement to anxiety meltdowns. Experience shows us that with the right changes in environment they are able to settle and re-engage in learning;
- children who usually find the mainstream environment overwhelming, which may be linked to sensory processing difficulties.

Pupils will have been supported through the county council's graduated response, with specialist advisory teachers having a clear understanding of their needs and what intervention is needed.

The aim will always be to develop self-regulation and resilience with a view to returning to mainstream education.

## **Character / ethos of the school**

The county council is seeking a sponsor that has a proven track record of maintaining excellent, dynamic leadership, management and governance.

The school will have expertise and a depth of knowledge of how children with autism and communication needs learn and the support they need. They will understand how anxiety can create demand avoidance and will offer a creative curriculum that offers a safe place to be.

There will be structure, nurture, engagement and challenge. This will ensure these pupils reach their potential and have choices as they move to secondary education.

The school will engender a love of learning and delight in seeking knowledge in pupils and staff, in an aspirational, inclusive learning environment that delivers sustainable, outstanding education.

There will be strong and ethical leadership which will embed a caring and moral ethos, respectful and supportive of each individual and their needs.

Success will mean a cohesive and collaborative approach, working with parents, carers and families, as well as working as part of the family of Hertfordshire schools and other local partners to effectively meet the needs of local children and young people.

Applicants should demonstrate how they will engrain a culture of sustainability within the curriculum and the operation of the school.

## **Community use**

The successful sponsor will be required to work with the district council and Sport England to agree the terms of a Community Use Agreement (CUA) for the school building and site. The sponsor will be responsible for preparing the CUA using a template provided by Sport England. The agreement will require a signature from the school and the district council. It will then need to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), Hertfordshire County Council, so that it can consult with Sport England to enable the planning condition to be discharged.

The exact details of any potential CUA are not known at this time however, generally the requirement is that the CUA shall endorse proposals for use of the school sports facilities by public organisations and include details of pricing policy, hours of use, access by non-establishment users, management responsibilities, a management plan, and a mechanism for review. The terms of the CUA shall be implemented for the lifetime of the school, unless otherwise agreed by the LPA.

The areas normally identified for community use are:

- ✦ Internally: Main Hall.

- ✦ Externally: Hard play external areas and external sports fields.

## **Transport arrangements**

Pupils will be eligible for funded home to school transport if they meet the criteria, as set out in Hertfordshire's statutory school transport policy. Details of Hertfordshire's statutory school transport policy is available at: <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/local-offer/education-support/help-you-can-get-when-your-child-is-in-school/send-home-to-school-transport.aspx>

Sponsors should note that it is likely there will be a condition attached to the town planning permission for the new school, which will require the submission of a school travel plan to the Local Planning Authority prior to opening in September 2023. Full details will be available once the Town Planning Decision Notice is obtained. The aim of a school travel plan is to promote sustainable transport measures and it must be maintained for the lifetime of the school. It is expected that the sponsor will be responsible for providing these documents in order to meet these conditions.

## **Equalities impact analysis**

Sponsors will be required to demonstrate their commitment to promoting equality, diversity and eliminating unlawful discrimination.

The new school building and site will be fully accessible for disabled users including staff, pupils, and visitors, with the proper facilities and provisions in place to meet statutory obligations set out in Equality legislation and that brought together under the umbrella provisions of the Equality Act 2010. No negative impacts of the proposals have been identified.

## **Section C - Vision**

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in the county council's version of Annex C of the Free School Presumption guidance. As a minimum, please ensure your application for the school sets out a clear vision that includes:

- A strong educational vision and a curriculum delivery based on high standards of attainment for each key stage;
- A depth of knowledge of children with communication and autism and what works for this neurodiverse group;
- A broad and balanced curriculum that embraces the opportunities of delivering education to deliver a creative, innovative, coherent curriculum to enhance attainment and progress
- Strategies to engender a joy of learning and delight in seeking knowledge to help pupils flourish, develop confidence, maintain good relationships and a respect for others; helping to prepare them for life beyond school as global citizens;

- How you will promote aspiration and ambition in the initial years while the school community is limited and growing;
- A depth of knowledge and practice experience of children with communication and autism needs and the barriers that they may face, e.g. sensory processing, anxiety, demand avoidance;
- Knowledge of current research and understanding of how neurodiverse children learn and a commitment to continuing to keep current;
- Depth of knowledge of emotional wellbeing and how to create emotionally healthy minds
- Excellent support facilities to meet the needs of all children, including looked after children and disadvantaged children, etc.;
- A commitment to excellent outcomes which reflect individual pupil needs and facilitate excellent pupil progress;
- A commitment to deliver a high quality of teaching and learning, with the highest ambitions for the outcomes and wellbeing of all pupils;
- Plans for appropriate engagement with the local community and parents during the pre-opening period and any on-going engagement;
- Strategies to actively participate in the wider education community;
- A commitment to implementation of sustainable operation of the school to net zero carbon standards into the future and a commitment to engage pupils with the impact of climate change and developing stewardship towards the environment.

## **Section D - Education plan**

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in the county council's amended version of Annex C of the Free School Presumption guidance. As a minimum please ensure you demonstrate that the culture and ethos of the school will ensure the provision of:

- A coherent rich, deep, ambitious, broad and balanced, deliverable curriculum plan, which is consistent with the vision of the school and well matched to the needs of the; inclusive of the net zero carbon principles of the school;
- Strategies for measuring pupil performance and progress effectively and setting of challenging, aspirational targets;
- Strategies for high expectations in respect of work and behaviour and relationships with the school community and beyond;
- A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum for the school within the expected income levels; with a focus on excellent teaching (including strategies for effective performance management and CPD);
- A curriculum that offers structure, nurture, fosters engagement and when the time is right offers challenge;
- A curriculum that allows for flexibility and different learning styles;
- A curriculum that develops resilience and values neurodiversity;

- Learning and care which is inclusive and well matched to pupil needs to ensure the needs of all children are fully provided for;
- Enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs that enhance the experiences and address the needs of all pupils;
- A shared approach to PHSE that is inclusive and well matched to meet pupil needs and addresses; the Prevent Duty; 'keeping children safe' safeguarding and welfare; and promoting fundamental British values (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs);
- Strategies to help pupils flourish, showing dignity and respect for all.

## **Section E – Capacity and capability**

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in the county council's amended version of Annex C of the Free School Presumption guidance. Where appropriate, indicate how the opportunities of delivering education will be used to enhance your capacity and capability. As a minimum please ensure you include details of the following:

- The resources you would draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new school by the opening date;
- Clear evidence that you have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including; leadership; managing school finances (including how you propose to manage the new school's finances with the funding set out in Section F below); project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety;
- How the school would be organised and what the governance and leadership arrangements would look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures;
- Demonstrate capacity to adhere to the net zero carbon principles of the school and give this aspect sufficient staffing to be maintained.

## **Section F – Funding and costs**

### Building

The site is owned by the county council and is expected to be made available to the academy sponsor on a 125 year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the Academies Act 2010, and any amendments having regard to the county council's title to the assets to be leased.

The delivery of the school building will be fully funded by Hertfordshire County Council.

## Revenue

As the new school will be an academy (free school), the successful sponsor will need to enter into a revenue funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education. The DfE currently provides £25,000 towards the set-up costs to the successful sponsor. Further information can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sponsored-academies-funding-guidance-for-sponsors>

Once opened, the school will be funded through the agreed pupil funded number and pupil top up. Each year, during the autumn term, the county council agrees the pupil number at which to fund the special school for the following academic year based on demand for places and school capacity. This number drives the place funding received by the school (£10,000 per place).

Top up funding is received per pupil for the time the pupil attends the school. It is envisaged that in year 1, the funded number will be 36 (i.e. 60% capacity), and 60 in year 2 (100% capacity). The indicative top up funding is £15.8k per pupil, based on a pupil profile of 10% band C, 80% band D and 10% band E. The indicative funding for the first academic year is therefore £744k, and £1,551k in year 2.

Hertfordshire County Council's special school banding and top up rates are currently undergoing an extensive review by the county council. The outcome of this review may impact the top up value for the new primary special school for children with communication and autism needs.

END