

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date of meeting: 24 July 2023

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Grove Park School

Purpose: To seek Lead Member approval to publish a statutory proposal in respect of the proposed reorganisation and expansion of Grove Park School.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) approve publication of a statutory proposal in respect of the proposed reorganisation and expansion of Grove Park School; and
 - 2) delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to amend the proposal prior to its publication if required.
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1. Background

1.1 Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for all pupils, including for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). East Sussex County Council (the local authority)'s SEND forecasts provide clear evidence that we will continue to see an increase in the number of pupils with SEND in the coming years.

1.2 The numbers of school aged children and young people aged 4-19 in East Sussex with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) have been rising steeply in recent years, from 3,126 in 2018-19 to 3,494 in 2021-22, an increase of 12%. In 2021-22, there were also 400 young people aged 19-25 in East Sussex with an EHCP.

1.3 In the next four years, the local authority forecasts that overall numbers of school-aged children and young people aged 4-19 with EHCPs will grow by around 15%, to approximately 4,000.

1.4 Linked to the rise in pupils with EHCPs with a primary need of profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), pupil numbers have increased significantly at Grove Park School, in Crowborough (the school). At the request of the local authority the school has also taken pupils with a broader range of need, including pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As a result, pupil numbers at the school have grown from 100 in 2012/13 to 133 in 2022/23, an increase of 33%.

1.5 As the only special school in the north of the county, there will continue to be significant pressure on places at the school for PMLD places as well as the other needs that the school caters for, including ASD.

2. Supporting information

Current accommodation and capacity issues

2.1 The school currently has three phases: primary, secondary and sixth form on separate sites in Crowborough. The primary phase (4-11) is based at Church Road, the secondary phase (11-16) is co-located on the Beacon Academy secondary site in Beeches Road and the sixth form (post-16) is co-located with Beacon Academy's sixth form at Green Lane.

2.2 As a result of the increasing pupil numbers, the school is struggling to accommodate its current pupils, particularly its secondary and sixth form pupils co-located at Beacon Academy. The school therefore requires larger accommodation to meet the growing demand for places.

The proposal

2.3 The proposal is in three parts:

- To lower the school's age range from 4-19 to 2-19 to establish nursery provision for eight full-time equivalent (fte) two and three year olds.
- To enlarge the premises at the Church Road site to accommodate secondary and sixth form pupils currently co-located at Beacon Academy (ending that arrangement).
- To increase the number of places for secondary and sixth form pupils. This would take the total number of places available at the school for primary, secondary and sixth form to 152, as illustrated in chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Planned capacity by phase

Early Years age 2-4	Primary age 4-11	Secondary age 11-16	Sixth Form age 16-19	Total age 4-19
8fte	56	60	36	152

2.4 Subject to detailed design, planning and construction it is intended that the proposed reorganisation and expansion of the school would be implemented with effect from 1 September 2025.

The benefits of the proposal

2.5 The local authority believes that in addition to the provision of more places there are a number of benefits for pupils and staff of bringing the school's accommodation together on one site:

- Currently, the three sites have a 'staggered' start time as the transport services drop off at each site, which also has an impact on the local traffic. By bringing all pupils together on one site this would no longer be an issue.
- Pupils attending the secondary and sixth form provision have limited access to shared spaces, such as the sports facilities and specialist rooms. A single site for the school would afford ownership of those facilities and the flexibility to timetable spaces with the needs of the pupils at the centre of the decision making.
- By bringing the secondary and sixth form pupils to the Church Road site they would have access to outside spaces enriched with sports and sensory play equipment which would be of benefit to them.
- Currently the hydrotherapy pool is located on the secondary site of Beacon Academy. Whilst this is a short walk for the secondary pupils, sixth form and primary pupils rely on minibus transportation to get there. Not only is this transition challenging for some pupils, but it is also time consuming, which equates to lost learning time.
- In addition to better access to resources, the school's budget can be used more effectively by services being centralised, for example, one reception area, rather than three. Teaching, administration, and site staff would work across the whole site, leading to better utilisation and deployment of staff.
- Currently, the ability to share learning resources is limited, for example, the school has three PE storage areas with similar resources, which on a single site, could more easily be shared, leading to better utilisation of learning resources.
- For regular visitors, for example therapists, being able to visit one site would reduce travel time and increase the access to therapy for those pupils that need it.

- Coming together on one site would give the pupils and their families an improved sense of community, belonging and identity.

Consultation and statutory process

2.6 In accordance with Section 19 (1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006) (as amended) and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 (the regulations), the local authority consulted on the proposed reorganisation and expansion of the school between 19 May and 23 June 2023. The consultation was available on the local authority's consultation hub. By the close of the consultation period, 20 responses had been received.

2.7 In response to question 1 'Do you support the proposal to lower Grove Park School's age range to establish nursery provision for eight full-time equivalent two and three year olds?'

- 80% support the proposal
- 15% do not support the proposal
- 5% are undecided

2.8 In response to question 2 'Do you support the proposal to enlarge the premises at the Church Road site to accommodate secondary and sixth form pupils currently co-located at Beacon Academy (ending that arrangement)?'

- 75% support the proposal
- 20% do not support the proposal
- 5% are undecided

2.9 In response to question 3 'Do you support the proposal to increase the number of places for secondary and sixth form pupils? This would take the total number of school places available at the school for primary, secondary and sixth form to 152?'

- 80% support the proposal
- 10% do not support the proposal
- 10% are undecided

2.10 From the comments received, there is a recognition of the need for more places in the area and the benefits of bringing the school together on one site. Concerns were raised about the capacity of the Church Road site to accommodate an all-through school, the impact on parking and drop-off/pick up arrangements, and the potential impact on pupils of noise and disruption during a build project. In response to these concerns, the local authority has undertaken an initial scoping of the site which shows there is sufficient space on the Church Road site for expansion. Any impact on parking and drop off/pick up arrangements would be addressed through the detailed design and planning stage of the project. As part of this process, the local authority's capital projects and highways functions would work closely to ensure any identified risks are mitigated. The building works would be planned carefully, and contractors would work closely with the school to ensure that works are scheduled to keep noise and disruption to a minimum. The building site would be a secure area to ensure the health and safety of the children, young people, staff, parents/carers and visitors to the school.

2.11 A consultation summary report, providing a more detailed analysis of the responses received during the consultation period, is available to view in the Cabinet and Members rooms at County Hall.

Equality Impact Assessment

2.12 The Lead Member is required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty, 'PSED') in determining these proposals. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is being undertaken as part of the statutory process to identify any equality implications of the proposal and to address any concerns through appropriate mitigations. The EqIA will be reported to the Lead Member prior to a final decision being taken on the proposal.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 In conclusion, the local authority is proposing to reorganise provision at the school by lowering its age range, bringing the primary, secondary and sixth form phases together on one site and expanding its overall capacity to meet the increasing demand for places with effect from 1 September 2025. The majority of respondents to the consultation are supportive of the proposal.

3.2 For these reasons the Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) approve publication of a statutory proposal in respect of the proposed reorganisation and expansion of Grove Park School; and
- 2) delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services to amend the proposal prior to its publication if required.

ALISON JEFFERY
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LOCAL MEMBERS
Councillor Johanna Howell
Councillor Philip Lunn

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
None