

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

Date: 9 December 2024

By: Director of Children's Services

Title of report: School Organisation Plan 2024 to 2028

Purpose of report: To approve the School Organisation Plan 2024 to 2028 for publication.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the School Organisation Plan 2024 to 2028 for publication.

1. Background

1.1 East Sussex County Council (the Local Authority) has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places to meet demand across East Sussex. In support of this duty, the Local Authority publishes a School Organisation Plan (the plan) annually. The plan sets out the projected demand for primary, secondary, and special school places in the future and where the Local Authority thinks it will need to commission additional places or reorganise existing provision to maintain a sustainable network of schools with the right number of places in the right locations to serve local need.

1.2 The current plan, covering the period 2023 to 2027, was approved for publication by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (the Lead Member) on 14 November 2023. A new draft plan covering the period 2024 to 2028 has been produced using the most recent set of pupil forecasts which take account of factors such as the latest information on births, GP registrations, parental preferences, housing developments and migration patterns. The draft plan can be viewed in Appendix 1.

2. East Sussex context

2.1 The draft plan describes how births in the county peaked at 5,500 in the academic year 2010/11. Since then, births have fallen to below 4,300 in 2022/23. The fall in countywide births is reflected in falling primary reception (Year R) intake numbers, at least until 2027/28. The Local Authority's latest pupil forecasts are showing numbers recovering beyond this point, however, intake forecasts beyond 2027/28 are based on demographic projections of future births rather than actual live birth or GP registration data. Looking at previous cycles of births and Year R intakes, it is possible that there may not be a recovery in Year R numbers until near the end of the decade and high Year R numbers across the county generally until the 2030s.

2.2 Earlier high numbers in primary schools have been reflected in rising secondary Year 7 school intakes. Year 7 numbers peaked in 2022/23, with total numbers on roll in secondary schools predicted to peak around 2026/27.

2.3 In 2023/24, the number of school aged children (aged 4-18) in East Sussex with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was 3,989. There were also 482 young people aged 19-25 with an EHCP who need continued support to transition to adulthood. Over the next four years, the Local Authority forecasts that overall numbers of school aged children with EHCPs will grow, by around 34%, to approximately 5,400. To meet this growing need, the Local Authority is continuing its strategy of increasing the number of places available in special schools and specialist facilities alongside developing inclusion in mainstream schools. This includes a proposed project to reorganise and expand Grove Park School to create additional places. The Local Authority is currently in the detailed design and planning phase of this project. In addition, the Local Authority plans to create additional specialist facility places through new and expanded facilities in primary and secondary schools and is currently seeking expressions of interest from schools for this.

2.4 The Local Authority has also identified a need for more specialist provision for post-16 learners and is working with special schools, Further Education (FE) Colleges and other post-16 providers to explore how this can best be delivered.

Stakeholder consultation

2.5 The Local Authority consulted on the draft plan with schools, academy trusts, the Diocese of Chichester and the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton in Term 1 of the current academic year. Seven responses were received - from a headteacher, four chairs of governors, an academy trust and the Catholic Diocese. The comments and the Local Authority's responses are available in the Cabinet room and Members' room.

3. Conclusions and reasons for recommendation

3.1 In conclusion, the draft School Organisation Plan for the period 2024 to 2028 sets out how the Local Authority seeks to ensure there are sufficient primary, secondary and special school places in the right locations to meet demand in accordance with its statutory duty.

3.2 Accordingly, the Lead Member is recommended to approve the School Organisation Plan 2024 to 2028 for publication.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None