

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

Date: 25 March 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title of report: Grove Park School

Purpose of report: To determine the statutory proposal to reorganise Grove Park School and enlarge its Church Road premises.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the proposal to lower Grove Park School's age range from 4-19 to 2-19 and relocate its secondary phase to the school's Church Road premises to accommodate additional pupils by September 2027, contingent upon planning permission being granted for the new block by the Local Authority's Planning Committee.

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). The overall numbers of children and young people aged 4 to 25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has been rising steeply. In 2023/24, the number of school aged children (aged 4-18) in East Sussex with an EHCP stood at 3,989. Over the next 4 years, the Local Authority forecasts that overall numbers of school aged children with EHCPs will grow, by around 34%, to stand at approximately 5,400.

1.2 There continues to be pressure on places for children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The number of children identified as autistic is growing year on year and is translating into rapidly increasing numbers of EHCPs issued with a primary need classification of 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)'. There are no signs of this trend reducing, and autism diagnoses look like being the biggest driver of rising EHCP numbers in the coming years. Linked to the rise in pupils with EHCPs, pupil numbers have increased significantly at Grove Park School, in Crowborough. At the request of the Local Authority, the school has taken pupils with a broader range of need than Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), including pupils with autism and pupils with severe learning difficulties.

1.3 Grove Park School currently has 3 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. As the only special school in the north of the county, it will continue to experience significant pressure on places. The Local Authority is therefore proposing to reorganise Grove Park School and enlarge its Church Road premises to meet the growing demand for places.

2. Supporting Information

Proposal

2.1 In accordance with section 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006), as amended by the Education Act 2011, the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, a statutory proposal was published by the Local Authority on 10 January 2025 to:

- lower Grove Park School's age range from 4-19 to 2-19 to establish nursery provision for 8 full-time equivalent 2- and 3-year-olds, and
- relocate the secondary phase to Grove Park School's Church Road premises to accommodate additional pupils by building a new block on the site, thereby partially ending the school's current co-location arrangement with Beacon Academy.

2.2 This is a slight change to the proposal which the Local Authority consulted on in 2023. It was originally proposed to enlarge the premises at the Church Road site to also accommodate an enlarged sixth form. However, due to budgetary constraints and challenging site conditions at the Church Road site it has been necessary for the Local Authority to reduce the scope of the proposed project. As a result, under the amended proposals Grove Park School sixth form pupils would continue to be co-located at Beacon Academy.

2.3 The Local Authority believes bringing Grove Park School's primary and secondary phases together on one site, and adding nursery provision, would have several benefits for the pupils attending the school:

- The increasing pupil numbers at Grove Park School and Beacon Academy has meant that the intended integration of both cohorts of pupils is no longer practical.
- Pupils attending the secondary provision have limited access to shared spaces, such as the sports facilities and specialist rooms. A single site for primary and secondary pupils at Grove Park 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.
- The school's budget can be used more effectively as some services could be centralised, for example, one reception area at Church Road for primary and secondary. Teaching, administration, and site staff would work across 2 sites rather than 3, leading to better utilisation and deployment of staff.
- Currently, the ability to share learning resources is limited, for example, the school has 3 Physical Education (PE) storage areas with similar resources, which on 2 sites, could more easily be shared, leading to better utilisation of learning resources.
- For regular visitors, for example therapists, being able to visit 2 sites would reduce travel time and increase the access to therapy for those pupils that need it.
- Bringing the primary and secondary phases together on one site would give pupils and their families an enhanced sense of community, belonging and identity.

2.4 The statutory proposal was published on the Local Authority's website. A brief notice containing details of where interested parties could find the full proposal and how they could comment on, or object to, the proposal, was published in the Sussex Express and posted on the gates to the school's premises. By the end of the representation period on 6 February 2025, 2 responses had been received.

2.5 The main concerns raised by respondents related to the impact on traffic on Church Road, the sufficiency of car parking on the school site and the positioning of the proposed new block in relation to the school entrance on Church Road. These are matters for the Local Authority's Planning Committee to consider in determining the planning application for the new block. The 2 responses can be viewed in full in the Cabinet and Members' rooms at County Hall.

Project delivery and costs

2.6 The final build solution is subject to planning permission. A report is due to be considered by the Local Authority's Planning Committee on 30 April 2025.

2.7 A budget of approximately £17m has been identified in the Local Authority's approved Capital Programme for the project. The new block would be constructed to current design standards to ensure long term value for money. Subject to planning permission being granted, construction is anticipated to start later this year with completion during the 2026/27 academic year for a full opening by September 2027.

Equality Impact Assessment

2.8 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) in determining the proposal. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken to identify any equality implications of the proposal and to address any concerns through appropriate mitigations and can be found at Appendix 1. No potential equality barriers were identified by stakeholders during either the initial consultation or the subsequent representation period following the publication of the statutory proposal. The Local Authority considers that the proposal would have a positive impact on provision for families at the school. All potential impacts were assessed and appropriate mitigations set out in the EqIA.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

3.1 In conclusion, the Local Authority is proposing to reorganise Grove Park School by lowering its age range and enlarging its Church Road premises by building a new block on the site to accommodate secondary age pupils by 1 September 2027.

3.2 In accordance with the EIA 2006 and the 2013 Regulations, the Local Authority, as the responsible body, is required to determine the statutory proposal within 2 months of the end of the representation period. The Regulations set out the options the decision-maker has to consider when making a decision. The decision-maker can:

- reject the proposal
- approve the proposal without modification
- approve the proposal with modifications, or
- approve the proposal, with or without modification, subject to certain conditions being met.

3.3 In this instance, a planning application for the proposed enlargement of the Church Road premises was submitted in November 2024 and is due to be determined by the Local Authority's Planning Committee on 30 April 2025. Consequently, the Lead Member is recommended to approve without modification the proposal to lower Grove Park School's age range from 4-19 to 2-19 and relocate its secondary phase to the school's Church Road premises to accommodate additional pupils by September 2027, contingent upon planning permission being granted for the new block by the Local Authority's Planning Committee.

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LOCAL MEMBERS
Councillor Johanna Howell
Councillor Philip Lunn

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
Representations made to the statutory proposal