

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

**Date:** 2 June 2025

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title of report:** Grove Park School

**Purpose of report:** To determine the statutory proposal to change the designation of Grove Park School.

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Lead Member is recommended to approve a proposal to change the type of need catered for by Grove Park School with effect from 1 September 2025 to include Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Severe Learning Difficulties in addition to its current designation of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.**

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### **1. Background**

1.1 Grove Park School in Crowborough is a Local Authority maintained special school for pupils aged 4-19. The school currently has a formal designation of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD).

1.2 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.

1.3 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 will likely be 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. At the request of the Local Authority, the school has taken pupils with a broader range of need than PMLD, including pupils with a classification of ASD and pupils with a classification of Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD).

1.4 To more accurately reflect the needs of the school's cohort of pupils, the Interim Executive Board (IEB) of Grove Park School is proposing to change the type of need catered for by the school to include ASD and SLD in addition to its current designation of PMLD from 1 September 2025. This means that any new admissions to the school will be considered against this designation, and the school will be able to plan its curriculum and support to ensure it meets the needs of these pupils. There will be no impact on the placement of current pupils at the school, regardless of their need they will continue at the school.

### **2. Supporting Information**

#### Consultation

2.1 The IEB consulted between 17 January 2025 and 14 February 2025 on a proposal to change the type of need catered for by the school with effect from 1 September 2025. The IEB consulted with the school community, school staff, other local special schools, trade unions, the local authority, local county councillors and neighbouring local authorities that commission places at the school.

2.2 By the close of the consultation period 1 response had been received. The respondent was unsure if they supported the proposal. Their main concern related to addressing existing issues within the school before pursuing change or welcoming additional students; that the current environment may not appeal to prospective families and that the focus should remain on ensuring a positive experience for the students who are already part of the school community.

## Proposal

2.3 In accordance with section 19(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006), as amended by the Education Act 2011 and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, the IEB published a statutory proposal on Grove Park School's website on Friday 28 March 2025. 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.

2.4 Publication of the notice was followed by a four-week period of representation, when comments or objections could be made to the Local Authority. By the end of the representation period on 24 April 2025, no comments or objections had been received.

## Equality Impact Assessment

2.5 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. 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 EqIA can be found in Appendix 1 to this report.

## **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation**

3.1 Over a number of years Grove Park School has accepted pupils with a broader range of need than PMLD, including pupils with ASD and SLD. The IEB's proposal to change the type of need catered for by Grove Park School to include ASD and SLD in addition to its current designation of PMLD with effect from 1 September 2025 will more accurately reflect the needs of the school's cohort of pupils. This means that any new admissions to the school would be considered against this new designation, and the school would be able to plan its curriculum and support to ensure it meets the needs of these pupils. There would be no impact on the placement of current pupils at the school, regardless of their need they would continue at the school.

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 must consider when making a decision, or the proposal must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator. 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, the Lead Member is recommended to approve without modification the change to Grove Park School's designation with effect from 1 September 2025.

**CAROLYN FAIR**  
**Director of Children's Services**

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LOCAL MEMBERS  
Councillor Johanna Howell  
Councillor Philip Lunn

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013  
[Education and Inspections Act 2006](#)