John O'Gaunt School – Specialist Inclusion Base

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	12 November 2026
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	Mark Lewis

1 Purpose of the Report

To seek approval for capital funding and inclusion in the Council's capital programme to enable construction of a Specialist Inclusion Base as part of the DfE School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) project to rebuild John O'Gaunt School. To also seek approval to utilise the 'retained land' at the school for the purposes of temporary decant accommodation for the DfE School Rebuilding Programme project.

2 Recommendations

2.1 To approve capital funding and inclusion into the Council's capital programme to enable construction of a Specialist Inclusion Base as part of the DfE School Rebuilding Programme Project to rebuild the school.

2.2 To approve the temporary use of the retained land for decant accommodation for the DfE School Rebuilding Programme project.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	The capital financial implications should be similar to any inclusion of a capital project on the council's capital programme. The capital funding allocated to the project sits within a proposed externally funded programme and fits within the current and likely future grant funding envelope. The project itself is proposed to be funded through existing capital grant (£3.75m) and a £700k contribution from CIL. Approval has been received from the CIL Team, as part of the capital programme refresh process, on the proposed use of CIL on this project.

CIL funding is dependent on the Council having sufficient receipts in the CIL reserve. In instances that the Council does not, the amount would, by default, be covered by additional borrowing, which would have a subsequent capital financing impact.

It is anticipated that five pupils will join the provision each year. Based on current demand, it is expected that two pupils per cohort may otherwise require independent or non-maintained specialist placements, generating an estimated avoidance of £70,000 per pupil per year. In addition, some pupils currently supported through alternative arrangements, such as Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) and Alternative Provision (AP) following exclusion, will access the provision, generating further cost avoidance as detailed in the table below. This has been estimated as one child per year from EOTAS and one from AP per year.

The annual cost avoidance against the HNB based on the above is set out in the table below:

Financial year	FY29/30	FY30/31	FY31/32	FY32/33	FY33/34	Total
Benefits						
Placement Cost Avoidance INMSS	(140,000)	(280,000)	(420,000)	(560,000)	(700,000)	(2,100,000)
Placement Cost Avoidance EOTAS	(30,000)	(60,000)	(90,000)	(120,000)	(150,000)	(450,000)
Placement Cost Avoidance AP (following exclusion)	(38,800)	(77,600)	(116,400)	(155,200)	(388,005)	(776,005)
Total Benefits	**(208,800)**	**(417,600)**	**(626,400)**	**(835,200)**	**(1,238,005)**	

On 29 October 2026, the Government announced a new minded-to decision following its review of earlier LGR decisions. Its preferred option remains as previously approved: West Berkshire Council will combine with the majority of the areas currently administered by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils to form a new unitary authority. A short further period for representations from councils and MPs is being allowed before a final confirmation is issued. If confirmed, the planned implementation date will be 1 April 2029.

The implications of LGR for the Council's financial, asset and contractual decisions could be subject to the timing and terms of any Section 24 Direction. Any such Direction may introduce additional approval requirements for decisions relating to this project. The applicability of these requirements will need to be confirmed against the terms of any Direction issued.

The project's currently anticipated completion and the Council's contribution at Practical Completion fall within the 2029/30 financial year, after the implementation date of 1 April 2029. The implications for the funding commitment, project governance and delivery timetable will therefore need to be considered as part of the transition to the new unitary authority, including any approvals required under a Section 24 Direction.

Human Resource:	The project is not expected to result in any transfer of staff or significant changes to existing employment arrangements, as it focuses on the provision of additional specialist educational accommodation at John O'Gaunt School. As such, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) are not currently expected to apply, although this will be kept under review should delivery or operational arrangements change. The Inclusion Base may require the recruitment or development of specialist staff to support pupils with complex autism. The school will be responsible for workforce planning, staff training and ongoing professional development, working with the SEND Service to ensure appropriate skills and qualifications are in place. West Berkshire Council and the school will continue to apply existing employment policies, staff wellbeing arrangements and consultation processes throughout the project to ensure that any workforce implications are appropriately managed.
Legal:	The Academy Trust occupies the John O'Gaunt School under an Academy Lease. A licence for alterations will be required under the terms of that lease for the proposed re-build. The licence (consent) for the proposed works is given by the Council as the freehold landowner. The DfE wish to use the 'retained land' on the site for the purposes of temporary decant accommodation. A licence to occupy the site will be needed for the duration of the proposed works. The council will not be party to any construction contract. The commitment from the council to fund the Specialist Inclusion Base will be with the DfE.
Risk Management:	There are several outstanding matters that need to be clarified, that would constitute risks, namely: • How financial contribution is calculated – a desk top cost estimation has been undertaken based on the likely accommodation requirements for a 25-place Specialist Inclusion Base for pupils with autism to create the proposed budget in the capital programme. Will need to clarify with the DfE as to how they intend to apportion costs. Will be progressed and clarity sought as soon as possible. • Financial commitment – need to establish the legal mechanism for confirming a financial contribution to the

	DfE. Will be progressed and clarity sought as soon as possible. • Project governance – need to establish the governance process for a DfE managed project, where the Council has a financial commitment in the project. Will be progressed and clarity sought as soon as possible. • Financial contribution – financial contribution may change from the initial budget that has been established. This is a risk for all capital projects and will be managed as part of the DfE project governance process. • Licences – an agreement for the DfE to utilise the retained land and for a licence to undertake the proposed SRP works will need to be established. Already in dialogue with Legal and Strategic Assets. • Statutory Process – the proposed provision of a specialist base falls under the Making significant changes to an academy guidance from the DfE. This requires academies to follow a significant change process, which requires a minimum 3-week public consultation and DfE approval. • Sports Hall – the DfE had confirmed that the re-built school would not be built with a sports hall due to the proposed size (pupil capacity) of the school. The equivalent of two activity studios would be provided. However, since then the DfE has confirmed that their current option is for a 3-court sports hall and a single activity studio. The impact on community use, health and leisure contract is being investigated by the Service Director Community Service and is the subject of a separate report.
Property:	The property related matters are covered under the Legal section above.
Policy:	The proposal relates to the School Rebuilding Programme, which is a national policy to address the most urgent condition needs across the whole school estate and more specifically to the SEND Reforms around increased inclusive capacity in specialist provision.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	**X**			The proposal aims to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for children with protected characteristics, focusing on local provision that reduce travel burdens and enable students to remain in their communities.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	**X**			The proposal will directly impact the lives of families and children and young people with SEND as it aims to ensure there is sufficient local places. By increasing sufficiency, a more inclusive and supportive environment is enabled for pupils with SEND.
Environmental Impact:	**X**			Local placements reduce the environmental impact associated with long-distance travel for pupils needing specialist provision.
Health Impact:	**X**			The proposal is expected to have a positive health impact by providing pupils with complex autism with a safe, accessible and appropriately designed learning environment, including spaces that support sensory regulation and emotional wellbeing. Access to suitable specialist support within a mainstream setting should reduce anxiety, improve engagement and attendance, and enable earlier, more coordinated support. Providing placements closer to home may also reduce the stress and fatigue associated with long journeys to out-of-area provision, benefiting pupils' wellbeing and reducing pressure on families.
ICT Impact:		**X**		No impact

Digital Services Impact:		**X**		No impact
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			Priority 2 – A Fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all: It prioritises support for children with complex autism, expands local SEND capacity and responds directly to the commitment to review and improve SEND capacity and provision. It should improve access to suitable education, reduce inequality in outcomes and enable more pupils to remain within their local community. Priority 1 – Services we are proud of: It would strengthen the quality, sufficiency and resilience of the Council's SEND offer, provide more timely specialist support, and make more effective use of public resources by reducing dependence on higher-cost independent and out-of-area placements. Priority 3 – Tackling the climate and ecological emergency: Increasing local provision should reduce the need for long-distance journeys to out of area placements. Incorporating the base into the wider rebuild also enables it to benefit from the programme's modern and efficient building design.
Core Business:	**X**			The proposal strongly aligns with the West Berkshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024–2029, particularly its principles of early intervention, inclusion, person-centred planning, supporting children close to where they live and ensuring sufficient local provision for complex needs. The proposal makes a positive contribution to the Council Strategy, most directly supporting the priorities of A Fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all and Services we are proud of. It will increase local specialist SEND capacity, improve access to suitable and timely support for pupils with complex autism, and reduce inequalities arising from a shortage of appropriate local placements. It should also strengthen service and

				financial resilience by reducing reliance on higher-cost independent, non-maintained and out-of-area provision. By enabling more pupils to be educated closer to home, the proposal supports thriving communities and should reduce long-distance travel and its associated environmental impact. It is also consistent with the Council's SEND and Inclusion Strategy, including its commitments to inclusion, early intervention, local sufficiency and supporting children close to where they live.
Data Impact:		**X**		No impact

Consultation and Engagement:	Sarah House, Principal Lawyer – Planning, Regeneration & Property. Brittney Marsh, Strategic Assets Development and Planning Manager. James Beresford, Strategic Assets Manager

4 Executive Summary

4.1 The Department for Education's (DfE) School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) is a national programme established to address school buildings in the poorest condition and to provide pupils and staff with modern, safe, efficient and sustainable learning environments. John O'Gaunt School has been accepted into the programme, meaning that the school buildings will be rebuilt through DfE funded and delivery arrangements.

4.2 Alongside the inclusion of the school in the SRP plans for a 25-place Autism Specialist Inclusion Base at the school have been developed. The proposed specialist provision is to address the shortage of local specialist secondary autism places and reduce the reliance on costly out-of-area placements, by creating additional SEND capacity within West Berkshire.

4.3 It is proposed to provide the Specialist Inclusion Base at John O'Gaunt School as part of the wider DfE funded rebuild. The base would provide dedicated accommodation and support for pupils with additional needs, while enabling them to access mainstream curriculum, facilities and wider school life where appropriate. Locating the provision within the rebuilding project will allow the accommodation to be planned as part of the overall school design, ensuring it is fit for purpose, integrated into the site and delivered efficiently alongside the main construction programme.

4.4 The DfE require a commitment from the Council as to whether funding for the specialist provision will be available. This commitment needs to be in place ahead of their project

review meeting on the rebuild option and funding in November 2026. This is a formal milestone/decision gate for their project before it can move forward to the next stage. The report is therefore being brought forward to seek approval for the Council's capital funding contribution to support delivery of the Specialist Inclusion Base alongside the DfE-funded rebuilding project.

4.5 The current SRP programme anticipates some outline design work between December 2026 and March 2027 to confirm project viability, with the procurement of the Design and Build Contractor in April 2027. Completion of the project will most likely be during the 2029/30 financial year. The DfE will seek the WBC contribution for the specialist provision at Practical Completion of the project in the 2029/30 financial year.

4.6 The proposal is recommended because it would help meet identified SEND need locally, improve the range and sufficiency of provision available in West Berkshire, and make best use of the opportunity created by the SRP. Delivering the Specialist Inclusion Base as part of the rebuild would expedite a sustainable addition to the local education estate, support inclusion, and reduce reliance on more distant or higher-cost placements where pupils' needs can appropriately be met in a mainstream school with specialist support.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 This report seeks approval for the Council to provide capital funding for a 25-place Autism Specialist Inclusion Base at John O'Gaunt School and for the required funding to be included in the Council's capital programme. The provision would be delivered as part of the DfE's School Rebuilding Programme project to rebuild the school, enabling the specialist accommodation to be planned and constructed alongside the wider school redevelopment.

Background

5.2 The DfE's SRP is a national capital programme established to rebuild or substantially refurbish school buildings and blocks that are in the poorest condition across England. The programme is centrally led and funded by the DfE, with projects progressing through a structured business case, design, procurement and delivery process before moving into construction.

5.3 John O'Gaunt School was selected for inclusion in the SRP and the DfE has been undertaking surveys of the existing school buildings to determine project scope. The DfE has confirmed that these surveys have now been completed, and they will be recommending to their decision maker the full rebuild of John O'Gaunt School, albeit based on a 3FE intake (90 pupils) as against their current Published Admission Number or 120.

5.4 The school's inclusion in the SRP has created a time-limited opportunity for the Council to work with the DfE to incorporate additional specialist accommodation within the wider rebuild, rather than seeking to deliver the provision as a separate standalone project at a later date.

5.5 The proposed specialist provision at John O'Gaunt School is part of a wider programme of work to address the growing pressure on specialist SEND places, with a particular focus on expanding specialist capacity within mainstream school settings, where appropriate, so that pupils can benefit from targeted specialist support while remaining connected to a mainstream curriculum, peer group and wider school community. This approach is consistent with the direction of national SEND reforms, which emphasise earlier intervention, improved local sufficiency, greater inclusion and better value across the SEND system. It also aligns with DfE priorities to support more inclusive mainstream provision, including the development of specialist resource bases and inclusion bases that can reduce reliance on independent, non-maintained and out-of-area placements where pupils' needs can be appropriately met locally.

5.6 There are limited opportunities to establish secondary specialist resource base provision on mainstream school sites. Although DfE priorities and the direction of national SEND reform emphasise strengthening inclusion in mainstream schools, specialist provision must still be capable of being delivered safely, effectively and sustainably. A successful base requires suitable dedicated accommodation, access to appropriate support and outdoor spaces, effective safeguarding and circulation arrangements, and a host school with the ethos, leadership capacity and operational readiness to integrate specialist provision within mainstream school life.

5.7 Many secondary school sites are already constrained by accommodation pressures, building condition, site layout and likely planning issues. In some cases, establishing a base would require significant adaptation, displace existing teaching space or create operational difficulties for the wider school. For this reason, viable mainstream secondary sites for specialist autism provision are scarce. The opportunity to incorporate provision within the John O'Gaunt SRP rebuild is therefore significant, as it enables the accommodation to be designed into the school from the outset and aligned with both local SEND sufficiency needs and national priorities for inclusive mainstream provision.

5.8 The SRP follows a structured approvals process, with key decision points at which the DfE confirms the scope of works and the associated project funding before the scheme can progress to the next stage. The next decision gate for the John O'Gaunt School project is scheduled for November 2026, when the DfE decision maker will be asked to sign off the proposed rebuild scope and funding envelope.

5.9 The report has been brought forward at this stage because the DfE requires confirmation of the Council's funding commitment before this project decision gate, at which the scope of works and funding envelope for the rebuild will be considered. Securing approval now will enable the Specialist Inclusion Base to be incorporated into the DfE-led project, supporting the Council's objective of increasing local specialist SEND provision and reducing reliance on more costly out-of-area placements.

Proposals

5.10 Currently, the needs of secondary-aged pupils with complex autism are met through a combination of mainstream school support, existing specialist provision within West Berkshire, and placements in independent, non-maintained and out-of-area specialist settings. Demand for specialist autism provision continues to increase, placing pressure on local capacity and reducing the availability of suitable placements close to home.

5.11 Where local provision cannot meet need, the Council commissions specialist placements through the SEND assessment and placement process. This includes independent and non-maintained special schools, Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) packages and alternative provision arrangements. These placements are funded primarily through the High Needs Block (HNB) and represent a significant and growing cost as demand for specialist provision increases.

5.12 West Berkshire Council needs to increase local specialist secondary autism provision to meet growing demand and reduce reliance on independent, non-maintained and out-of-area placements. Current capacity is insufficient to meet projected need, resulting in increased pressure on the HNB and limiting the availability of suitable local educational provision for children and young people with complex autism.

5.13 Integrating a specialist base within a mainstream secondary school is complex and requires more than the identification of available accommodation. The provision must be capable of operating as part of the wider school while also providing a safe, calm and appropriately specialist environment for pupils with complex autism. This can present challenges around curriculum access, timetabling, movement around a large secondary site, social integration, sensory needs, safeguarding arrangements, behaviour support, staff expertise and the availability of suitable breakout, therapy and quiet spaces.

5.14 The success of a specialist base also depends on the culture and operating model of the host school. Inclusive practice needs to be embedded across leadership, teaching, pastoral and support staff so that pupils are not simply accommodated on the site but are able to participate meaningfully in mainstream school life where appropriate. This requires clear governance, strong links between specialist and mainstream staff, appropriate training, shared expectations and careful planning of how pupils will access wider school facilities and transitions during the school day. Without these conditions, there is a risk that provision becomes isolated from the wider school or places additional pressure on mainstream systems.

5.15 The John O'Gaunt SRP rebuild provides an opportunity to address these integration challenges from the outset by designing the specialist accommodation, circulation, access arrangements and operational links as part of the wider school plan, rather than retrofitting provision into an existing constrained site.

5.16 The Inclusion Base will be implemented on a phased basis, initially admitting a full Year 7 cohort and growing incrementally. It is anticipated that five pupils will join the provision each year. Based on current demand, it is expected that two pupils per cohort may otherwise require independent or non-maintained specialist placements, generating an estimated avoidance of £70,000 per pupil per year. In addition, some pupils currently supported through alternative arrangements, such as Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) and Alternative Provision Following Exclusion, will access the provision, generating further cost avoidance of £68,800 in year 1, £137,600 in year 2 and so on a so forth.

5.17 The estimated capital cost of delivering the proposed specialist provision is approximately £4.45 million, based on current desktop estimates. This includes construction, external works, project contingency, professional fees and associated project costs. In line with all internally managed projects the project cost estimate will

be refined as the project progresses through feasibility and design. Further work will also be undertaken with the DfE to establish how the project costs will be apportioned across the SRP and SEND elements.

5.18 Funding for the proposed project is made up from £3.75m of existing external grant and £700k of CIL funding. Approval has been received from the CIL Team, as part of the capital programme refresh process, on the proposed use of CIL on this project. CIL funding is dependent on the Council having sufficient receipts in the CIL reserve. In instances that the Council does not, the amount would, by default, be covered by additional borrowing, which would have a subsequent capital financing impact. The funding profile sought in the Detailed Business Case is based the usual project spend profile, but the DfE has confirmed that the financial contribution from the Council will be sought at Practical Completion, currently anticipated to be financial year 2029/30. On that basis the £4.45m (or whatever the revised figure is) expenditure is currently anticipated to be within the 2029/30 financial year only. Any reprofiling of the capital budget will be agreed per the standard constitutional process.

5.19 There are several activities that are a work in progress, as follows:

(a) Financial cost apportionment – establishing the mechanism the DfE intend to use to apportion the costs for the specialist inclusion base. The mitigation is to liaise with the DfE ahead of their decision milestone date and seek relevant officer approval to the proposed approach.

(b) Financial commitment – establishing the legal mechanism that covers a capital financial commitment from the Council to a DfE capital project. The mitigation is to liaise with the DfE ahead of their decision milestone date and seek relevant senior officer approval to the proposed approach.

(c) Project governance – establishing how project governance will operate to ensure sufficient protection for the Council. The mitigation is to liaise with the DfE ahead of their decision milestone date and seek relevant senior officer approval to the proposed approach.

(d) Financial contribution – the cost of the specialist provision is likely to vary from the desk-top estimation undertake to establish an expenditure budget in the capital programme. The mitigation is to establish project governance, input into design and specification and how costs are apportioned (particularly around abnormal costs) with the DfE ahead of their decision milestone date and seek relevant senior officer approval to the proposed approach.

(e) Licences – there are agreements to put in place for the DfE to utilise the retained land and to undertake the works. The mitigation is liaison with Legal and Strategic Assets has already taken place and will continue to liaise with the DfE ahead of their decision milestone date and seek relevant senior officer approval to the proposed approach.

(f) Supplementary Academy Lease – this is required to regularise the extent of the land the Academy Trust was due to acquire when it converted to academy status in 2016 in relation to the leisure provision. The draft lease has been sent to the Academy Trust's lawyers. The mitigation is that the work has been underway for

some time and should be completed ahead of the DfE decision milestone date in November.

(g) Significant change process – the Making significant changes to an academy guidance from the DfE requires academies to follow a significant change process, which amongst other things requires a minimum 3-week public consultation and DfE approval. Currently in communication with the school/Trust regarding the process and obtaining approval ahead of the November DfE decision milestone date.

6 Other options considered

6.1 There are two other options that were considered – do nothing and undertake the specialist provision construction after the SRP project has completed.

Do nothing

6.2 This option is not recommended. It would leave the identified shortage of local specialist secondary autism provision unresolved and would not create the additional local SEND capacity required to meet growing demand. As a result, the Council would continue to rely on existing specialist provision, independent and non-maintained special school placements, Education Otherwise Than At School packages and other alternative provision arrangements where pupils' needs cannot be met locally. This would sustain pressure on the High Needs Block and limit the Council's ability to provide suitable placements close to home.

6.3 Taking no action would also miss the opportunity to incorporate the Specialist Inclusion Base within the DfE-funded School Rebuilding Programme at John O'Gaunt School. If the Council does not commit funding at this stage, the provision is unlikely to be included within the scope of the rebuild ahead of the DfE's November 2026 project decision gate. Any future proposal would therefore need to be developed separately after the SRP project has progressed or completed, which is likely to be less efficient, more disruptive to the school and potentially more costly. For these reasons, doing nothing would not address the sufficiency need, would weaken the Council's ability to manage rising SEND placement costs, and would fail to make best use of the current capital delivery opportunity.

Deliver after SRP project

6.4 This option is not recommended. Delivering the Specialist Inclusion Base after completion of the SRP project would require a separate capital scheme to be developed, designed, procured and constructed outside the DfE-led programme. This would remove the opportunity to integrate the specialist accommodation into the overall school design from the outset and would risk a less coherent layout, weaker operational links with the wider school, and reduced ability for pupils to access mainstream curriculum, facilities and wider school life in a planned and inclusive way.

6.5 A standalone project after completion of the rebuild is also likely to be less efficient and more costly. It would require separate professional fees, surveys, site investigations, procurement, contractor preliminaries, site set-up and project management arrangements, rather than benefiting from the economies of scale and established delivery structure of the SRP. Construction after the school has been rebuilt and is fully

operational would also create additional disruption for pupils, staff and the wider school community, including potential impacts on access, safeguarding, circulation, temporary accommodation and day-to-day school operation.

6.6 Delaying delivery would also postpone the creation of much-needed local specialist secondary autism capacity. During that period, the Council would continue to rely on independent and non-maintained placements, EOTAS packages and alternative provision where pupils' needs cannot be met locally, sustaining pressure on the High Needs Block and delaying the anticipated cost avoidance from the proposed provision.

7 Conclusion

7.1 This proposal provides the most effective, deliverable and timely means of increasing local specialist secondary autism provision while making best use of the opportunity created by the DfE School Rebuilding Programme at John O'Gaunt School. The proposed Specialist Inclusion Base would help address an identified sufficiency gap, support more pupils with complex autism to be educated locally, and reduce reliance on independent, non-maintained, out-of-area placements and other alternative arrangements where needs can appropriately be met within a mainstream school with specialist support. It supports national and local priorities for greater inclusion, strengthens West Berkshire's local SEND offer, contributes to managing pressure on the High Needs Block, and secures a time-limited opportunity to deliver long-term specialist capacity as part of a wider funded capital programme.

7.2 Approving the capital funding now is necessary to enable the provision to be incorporated into the DfE-led rebuild ahead of the November 2026 project decision gate. This will enable the accommodation to be planned, designed and constructed as part of the wider school rebuild rather than being delayed until a separate future project can be developed. It will also improve the suitability, operational effectiveness and value for money of the provision, while avoiding the additional cost, disruption and delivery risk associated with a later standalone scheme.

7.3 Approving the use of the retained land at the school for the purposes of providing space for decant accommodation will enable officers to work with the DfE to establish a legal agreement to use the land, for the School Rebuilding Programme project to maintain its delivery programme and to help reduce capital costs.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

8.2 Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment

8.3 Appendix C – Concept Business Case

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position: ☐

Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☐

Wards affected: Hungerford and Kintbury

Officer details:

Name: Mark Lewis
Job Title: Education Place Planning and Development Manager
Tel No: (01635) 519038
E-mail: Mark.Lewis@westberks.gov.uk

Appendix A

West Berkshire Council
Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE

March 2023

Contents

Section 1: Summary details.....16

Section 2: Detail of proposal 17

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics.....19

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts.....20

Section 4: Review.....21

Equity Impact Assessment

Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	People Children's Services, Education and SEND
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	The proposal to include the provision of a Specialist Inclusion Base at John O'Gaunt School in the council's capital programme via the DfE School Re-building Programme project to rebuild the school.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	No
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	To provide capital funding for a 25-place Autism Specialist Inclusion Base at John O'Gaunt School and for the required funding to be included in the Council's capital programme. The provision would be delivered as part of the Department for Education's (DfE) School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) project to rebuild the school, enabling the specialist accommodation to be planned and constructed alongside the wider school redevelopment. The proposal does not bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community.
Completed By	Mark Lewis
Authorised By	
Date of Assessment	08.09.26

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	The proposal is part of a wider programme of work to address the growing pressure on specialist SEND places, with a particular focus on expanding specialist capacity within mainstream school settings so that pupils can benefit from targeted specialist support while remaining connected to a mainstream curriculum, peer group and wider school community. This approach is consistent with the direction of national SEND reforms, which emphasise earlier intervention, improved local sufficiency, greater inclusion and better value across the SEND system. It also aligns with DfE priorities to support more inclusive mainstream provision, that can reduce reliance on independent, non-maintained and out-of-area placements where pupils' needs can be appropriately met locally. The school's inclusion in the SRP has created a time-limited opportunity for the Council to work with the DfE to incorporate additional specialist accommodation within the wider rebuild, rather than seeking to deliver the provision as a separate standalone project at a later date.
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	This proposal provides the most effective, deliverable and timely means of increasing local specialist provision while making best use of the opportunity created by the DfE School Rebuilding Programme. The proposal would help address an identified sufficiency gap, support more pupils with complex autism to be educated locally, and reduce reliance on independent, non-maintained, out-of-area placements and other alternative arrangements. It supports national and local priorities for greater inclusion, strengthens the local SEND offer, contributes to managing pressure on the High Needs Block (HNB), and secures a time-limited opportunity to deliver long-term specialist capacity as part of a wider funded capital programme. The proposal enables the provision to be incorporated into the DfE-led rebuild. This will enable the accommodation to be planned, designed and constructed as part of the wider school rebuild rather than being delayed until a separate future project can be developed. It will also improve the suitability, operational effectiveness and value for money of the provision, while avoiding the additional cost, disruption and delivery risk associated with a later standalone scheme.
Evidence / Intelligence List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports	This assessment is based on multiple data sources, including the Department for Education (DfE) School Capacity Survey (SCAP), West Berkshire SEND and Inclusion Strategy, Inform data on SEND profile for West Berkshire, DfE's Local Authority Interactive Tool which compares West Berkshire against statistical neighbours and internal SEND data from MRI. The national evidence indicates sustained growth in SEND need. Department for Education school census data for 2024/25 recorded 482,640 pupils in England with an Education, Health and Care Plan, representing

your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.	5.3% of the school population and an 11.1% increase from 2024. The data supports the need for local authorities to plan additional capacity rather than rely on existing provision remaining sufficient. Government policy increasingly prioritises inclusive mainstream education supported by specialist facilities. The Department for Education's £740 million capital investment was specifically intended to adapt mainstream schools and create specialist facilities capable of providing more intensive support.
Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	**Do nothing** – this would leave the identified shortage of local specialist secondary autism provision unresolved and would not create the additional local SEND capacity required to meet growing demand. There would be continued reliance on existing specialist provision, independent and non-maintained special school placements, EOTAS packages and other alternative provision arrangements where pupils' needs cannot be met locally. This would sustain pressure on the High Needs Block and limit the Council's ability to provide suitable placements close to home. It would also miss the opportunity to incorporate the proposal within the School Rebuilding Programme (SRP). Any future proposal would need to be developed separately after the SRP project has progressed or completed, which is likely to be less efficient, more disruptive to the school and potentially more costly. Doing nothing would not address the sufficiency need, would weaken the Council's ability to manage rising SEND placement costs, and would fail to make best use of the current capital delivery opportunity. **Deliver after SRP project** – this option would require a separate capital scheme to be developed, designed, procured and constructed outside the DfE-led programme. This would remove the opportunity to integrate the specialist accommodation into the overall school design from the outset and would risk a less coherent layout, weaker operational links with the wider school, and reduced ability for pupils to access mainstream curriculum, facilities and wider school life in a planned and inclusive way. A standalone project after completion of the rebuild is also likely to be less efficient and more costly. It would require separate professional fees, project management arrangements, etc. Construction after the school has been rebuilt and is fully operational would also create additional disruption for pupils, staff and the wider school community, including potential impacts on access, safeguarding, and day-to-day school operation. Delaying delivery would also postpone the creation of much-needed local specialist secondary autism capacity. During that period, the Council would continue to rely on independent and non-maintained placements, EOTAS packages and alternative provision where pupils' needs cannot be met locally, sustaining pressure on the HNB and delaying the anticipated cost avoidance from the proposed provision.

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	☐	☒	☐	Local specialist SEND facilities enhance accessibility.			
Disability	☐	☒	☐	Will benefit from targeted specialist support while remaining connected to a mainstream curriculum, peer group and wider school community. Will benefit from earlier intervention, greater inclusion and needs appropriately met locally.			
Gender Reassignment	☒	☐	☐	None			
Marriage & Civil Partnership	☒	☐	☐	None			
Pregnancy & Maternity	☒	☐	☐	None			
Race	☒	☐	☐	None			

Sex	☒	☐	☐	None			
Sexual Orientation	☒	☐	☐	None			
Religion or Belief	☒	☐	☐	None			

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	**No Impact**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Description of impact**	**Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts**	**Action owner** (*Job Title, Organisation)	**Timescale and monitoring arrangements**
Rural communities	☐	☒	☐	Improved access to specialist provision.			
Areas of deprivation	☐	☒	☐	Improved local SEND services increase accessibility for economically disadvantaged families.			
Displaced communities	☐	☒	☐	Reducing out-of-borough placements supports community stability.			
Care experienced people	☐	☒	☐	Promotes local, consistent support for children in care,			

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				addressing their unique vulnerabilities.			
The Armed Forces Community	☒	☐	☐	None			

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	**N/A**
Person Responsible for Review	**N/A**
Authorised By	**N/A**

EDI employee related EQiA's should now be sent to Human Resources hrenquiries@westberks.gov.uk.

Appendix B

Data Protection Impact Assessment – Stage One

The General Data Protection Regulations require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for certain projects that have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.

Should you require additional guidance in completing this assessment, please refer to the Information Management Officer via dp@westberks.gov.uk

Directorate:	People – Children's Services
Service:	Education
Team:	Place Planning and Development
Lead Officer:	Mark Lewis
Title of Project/System:	John O'Gaunt – Specialist Inclusion Base
Date of Assessment:	08.09.26

Do you need to do a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)?

	Yes	No
Will you be processing SENSITIVE or "special category" personal data? Note – sensitive personal data is described as "*data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation"*	☐	☒
Will you be processing data on a large scale? Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both	☐	☒
Will your project or system have a "social media" dimension? Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?	☐	☒
Will any decisions be automated? Note – does your system or process involve circumstances where an individual's input is "scored" or assessed without intervention/review/checking by a human being? Will there be any "profiling" of data subjects?	☐	☒

	Yes	No
Will your project/system involve CCTV or monitoring of an area accessible to the public?	☐	☒
Will you be using the data you collect to match or cross-reference against another existing set of data?	☐	☒
Will you be using any novel, or technologically advanced systems or processes? Note – this could include biometrics, "internet of things" connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilised	☐	☒

If you answer "Yes" to any of the above, you will probably need to complete Data Protection Impact Assessment - Stage Two. If you are unsure, please consult with the Information Management Officer before proceeding.