



Department
for Education

Local authority commissioned special free schools

**An expression of interest form for local
authorities interested in commissioning a
special free school**

October 2016

Overview

Since local authorities play a key role in placing pupils with statements or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, it is important that they shape the range of provision in their area. Previously, proposals to establish special free schools have only been taken forward in consultation with local authorities. **We are now providing a further opportunity for local authorities themselves to identify where a new special free school would benefit their area**, inform their Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), and potentially seek proposals for the new school they want, with the Department for Education (DfE) providing capital funding and start-up grants. This is in addition to the central route for special free schools, which continues to operate.

This **expression of interest (EOI) form is for local authorities that would like a new special school**. It allows them to make a case that a special school would be beneficial in their area, including a case that it would help meet demographic growth, changing patterns of need, and cost pressures, without reducing inclusion. It provides RSCs with the initial information they need to understand what is wanted and why. If the EOI is successful, the opportunity will be advertised nationally, and if a strong proposal comes forward that both the local authority/authorities and the Secretary of State wish to take forward, the DfE will provide capital and start-up grant funding, subject to value for money assessments covering both the affordability of the site solution and the limitations on overall capital availability. Please see the accompanying guidance for further detail.

The form should be completed by a local authority representative (or representatives, if it is a joint bid) with the approval of the Director of Children's Services (DCS).

This opportunity is intended to identify and meet untapped demand for special free schools as a supplement to LA's existing resources. It **does not replace the 'presumption' process nor does it replace a local authority's duties to ensure appropriate placements for all children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)**.

You should use this form to provide all the necessary information and evidence for your proposal. Please:

- email your RSC during October to say whether you are interested and give any headline facts available (email addresses are in the guidance)
- return this EOI, completed, to freeschool.special@education.gov.uk copying in your RSC, **by midday on 11 November**.

More detailed information about this process can be found in the [local authority-commissioned special free schools guidance](#).

Section A – Key facts about the school and the local authorities that want to commission it

A1: Who is putting forward this expression of interest?

If this is a joint EOI, please fill in the table below for each LA involved and state the lead LA below. The Regional Schools Commissioner’s team may need to contact these people to understand more about the EOI. **Please note that including a LA on this list means that they have committed to commissioning places.**

Name of LA	Name of person leading	Contact details
<p><i>Sunderland City Council</i></p>	<p>██████████ ██████████████████ ██████████</p>	<p>██████████████████████████████████████ ██████████████</p>
<p><i>Consultation has taken place with Durham County Council, South Tyneside Council and Gateshead Council. No commitment to commission places has been given at this time.</i></p>		

A2: What type of school is wanted?

Please provide key information about the school you would like to commission:

Category of SEN provision (if more than one type, with different top-up rates, please explain)	Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
Per-pupil revenue funding you would expect to pay (if a range of rates, please explain)	████████████████████
Age range	5-16
Gender (boys/girls/co-educational)	Co-educational
Total number of proposed places	96
Early years provision? If so, how many places?	0
16-19 provision? If so, how many places?	0
Community use/shared facilities	Discussion will be expected with likely bidder around provision of out of hours activities on the site for the cohort attending school. This could include Youth Club activity among others.

Please use this space to expand on any of the key information above [max. 200 words]

Top up rate has been estimated based on the costs of children with Autism currently placed within the specialist educational sector at one of Barbara Priestman Academy, Columbia Grange Primary School or Sunningdale Primary School.

A3: Conversations with partners

Local authorities (in particular smaller ones) **must** speak to their neighbouring LAs to check whether they want to commit to commissioning places at the new school at the specified top-up rate. If they do not, LAs may put in a solo EOI. Authorities **may** speak to other partners in order to ensure that their EOI will complement the local landscape and be a close match for what families want. If you have not engaged with your Schools Forum before sending this EOI to your Regional Schools Commissioner, you will need to do so if successful.

Who?	Conversation summary (3 points max)
Your neighbouring LAs – please specify	<p>Durham County Council, South Tyneside Council and Gateshead Council have all been approached with view to submitting a joint bid. Those local authorities currently commission places at Sunderland based ASD special schools and academies (notably Durham who commission a number of places at Barbara Priestman Academy). The three named authorities all border Sunderland.</p> <p>In the course of discussions no commitment to the bidding process was made. However, there is interest in commissioning places. At this time this interest has not been quantified.</p> <p>Additionally, given the increase in local demand for places and increase in the local ASD diagnosis rate, Sunderland Council considers it likely that the full capacity of 100 places will be reached by 2020 through local demand without the need to seek further placements from neighbouring local authority areas</p>
Optional: Your Parent / Carer Forum, or other representatives of parents and young people	<p>No discussions have taken place at this point. However, local SEND youth groups will be consulted on various aspects of the school (including extracurricular offers).</p> <p>The local Autism Support Team will be consulted and involved in the development of the site.</p>
Optional: Any other partners, Schools forum, existing FE colleges etc (please specify)	<p>This item was discussed at Sunderland's Schools forum on the 18th October. This was as part of a wider discussion on commissioned places. The forum was supportive of the Council's proposal on the establishment of a new school. Further consultation is planned as part the statutory process involved in establishing the new school.</p>

Who?	Conversation summary (3 points max)
	<p>Initial discussions have taken place with the Aspire Academy Trust (who currently oversee 4 special academies in Sunderland including the secondary ASD setting). This is in relation to the capacity issues faced by the academy on account of the oversubscription at Barbara Priestman Academy</p> <p>A report was submitted to Sunderland City Council's Cabinet in July 2016 proposing a new ASD school in the city. This identified the former Bishop Harland CE Primary Site as the likely location. Cabinet approved the selection of the site and gave formal approval to commence consultation on the establishment on a new school.</p>

Section B – The proposed location and site (if applicable)

Please describe where the school would be located and whether a site has been made available/identified. Making a site available on a peppercorn lease gives the greatest chance of the school opening successfully, and on time.

A site for the new school has been allocated. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. It was formally a 2 Form Entry Primary School with a 26 FTE place nursery attached. Capacity was for 210 pupils. The site exclusively accommodates the school and external areas and no other parties are collocated on site.

The existing building has 8 class bases all with capacity for 30 primary aged pupils (some modification will be required to improve circulation across the build). Classroom sizes range between 53m² and 67m² with the net area of the former nursery block 74m². The school formally accommodated an ICT suite (61m²) and library (33m²) which can be re-designated as teaching bases or support spaces. There is a former caretakers house attached to the main build which will also be developed within the refurbishment to provide teaching or support space. The exterior includes a courtyard area which is suitable to house an extension to the existing build (either modular or fixed build)

The site has access to its own outdoor area to the rear of the school which can be adapted to provide playing pitch facilities or be developed to aid the delivery of forest school activities.

The Council estimates that, given the level of remedial work required on site, minimum refurbishment costs will be [REDACTED]. This includes an extensive asbestos removal programme. Given the site is under the ownership of Sunderland Council no land purchase costs will be required. There is also the additional option to demolish the existing build and deliver a new purpose build school on the site

The current build was a purpose build primary school and the site remains designated as a school site. It has no listed status and is not set within a conservation area. On closure of the school it was identified as potential future housing site. However, given the identified need to establish a new ASD school, this has now been reviewed and the site has been held for this purpose. This was agreed by Sunderland Council's cabinet in July 2016. It has been agreed that the site will be released as part of the competition to identify a new provider for the school, with the successful MAT receiving a 125 year academy lease to operate on the site. This will be ratified in December 2016's cabinet.

The site will be made immediately available for works to commence. The Council will oversee design works, win consultation with the local Autism Support Unit, and will subsequently procure the capital works required to refurbish the site. It is anticipated that capital works can be complete by February 2016, although the Council will ensure the procurement process is consistent with the timescales included within this programme

Tenure will be granted on standard academy terms with a 125 year lease for buildings and playing fields to be negotiated with the successful Academy Trust. This will be on a peppercorn basis.

Please provide the name and contact details for the main LA contact about the site. The EFA may contact this person to ask questions about the site. **If you know any of these site details before submitting your EOI, please let DfE know (by emailing FreeSchools.EFACAPITAL@education.gov.uk) so we can start conversations with you.**

[REDACTED]

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Please tick the box below to confirm that the relevant Lead Member for Corporate Property has seen this expression of interest and is content with the information provided about site (if provided).

I confirm that the Lead Member of Corporate Property at **Sunderland Council** has seen this expression of interest and supports it.

Please tick to confirm

Section C – Rationale for School

Please provide an explanation of how and why this provision is required and how it would benefit the local area. [500 words max.]

The new school will complement the 7 special schools currently operating in Sunderland including the following Autism provision

- Columbia Grange Special School – Primary (100 places)
- Barbara Priestman Academy – ASD Secondary + Post 16 (100 places)
- Autism Units attached to Usworth Colliery Primary (15 places), Farrington Secondary Academy (30 places) and Biddick Academy (30 places)

Sunderland Council is increasingly commissioning places for Autistic children at non-ASD special schools. This includes 25 places at North View Academy and 22 places at Sunningdale Primary School. The requirement to commission Autism places at Sunningdale has resulted in a shortfall of places within the MLD sector.

There is no further capacity within the local Autism specialist sector. In 2014/15 the Council created an additional 20 places at Columbia Grange Primary school. Work was complete in December 2015 with all places commissioned in February 2016. There is no further expansion capacity on the site. The school currently has a waiting list of 15 children.

A 15 place Autism unit was established at Usworth Grange Primary School in September 2015 for primary aged children requiring a hybrid specialist and mainstream curriculum. All places were commissioned on opening.

The Secondary Autism sector in the city also has capacity pressures. Following a [REDACTED] extension in 2014, Barbara Priestman Academy (Sunderland's sole Autism specialist secondary provider) has a capacity of 100 places (60 pre-16 and 40 post-16 places). As of October 2016 there were 130 children on roll, 30 children above the site's capacity. The Council has estimated capital costs to create the additional teaching and support space for those 30 children currently on roll to be [REDACTED]. This investment will not create additional places but will provide suitable teaching space for those already attending the Academy. The Academy has previously unsuccessfully bid to CIF to fund this development.

The introduction of a new school would respond to both pupil place planning pressure and parental demand for Autism places. As diagnosis and identified needs rise parents are increasingly seeking special educational places in Sunderland, with some parents moving to the area in specifically to access local provision. This is an unsustainable position for the Council given there is currently no availability within the local Autism sector at primary or secondary levels leading to additional pressure on the local Autism schools to recruit above their established capacity. Increasingly parental demand for specialist places cannot be met in the city.

The development of a new Autism free school would respond to the needs from unplaced children within the primary sector (currently 15-20 children). It would enable sufficient secondary capacity to be created to enable the long term reduction in 11-16 commissioned places at Barbara Priestman Academy to match the Academy's identified capacity while also creating additional places in the secondary Autism Sector. It would also provide places to respond to the projected rising school age population in Sunderland over next 5 years (a result of an increase in the local birth-rate with large housing developments projected to increase demand for places further).

Section D – Pupil data and existing SEN provision

The purpose of this section is to help us to understand the need for a new school in the context of how existing provision is used, and future expected growth in need. We want to approve EOIs that:

- address demographic growth
- help LAs meet what pupils and parents want
- help LAs manage within their budgetary constraints

We do not want to approve EOIs that have the side-effect of decreasing inclusion in mainstream schools, or of creating excess spare capacity in existing special schools. (eg. if several LAs each want a similar school, any one of those might make sense on its own but in aggregate there might not be enough need.) In this section you need to explain how the places in this school would be filled and where the pupils would come from (D1). You also need to explain the general demographic trends and placement trends for *all* pupils with EHC plans (D2).

D1: Pupils who would go to the new special school

Please indicate how you expect the places in this school to be filled, and the impact on inclusion. [500 words max.]

There are 15 children identified in mainstream primary schools in the city who would immediately benefit from a commissioned place at a specialist setting.

There is a requirement to re-allocate 30 children currently admitted above capacity at Barbara Priestman. It is proposed that this occurs over a period of time to minimise budget impact on the academy. A minimum of 10 additional children of secondary age will require a specialist Autism place by 2018/19 (with 3 more children a year making a primary to secondary transition than those leaving secondary places).

At present the Autistic cohort is growing at a greater rate than the overall pupil cohort. Between 2012/13 – 2015/16 Sunderland's proportion of pupils requiring Autism support increased by 35%. School aged children with Statements or EHC plans identifying Autism as a primary aim increased by 16% over the same period. This represented 34 and 15 percentage point increases over the rise in the overall local school population in during the same period.

Support requirements will increase in line with pupil growth. By 2020/21, as a consequence of an increased birth-rate, the pupil population in Sunderland will be 3% larger than 2015/16 (1,109 additional pupils aged 5 – 16). If, as a minimum, the rate of demand for places from children with Autism remains at 1.8% there will be 20 additional children with Autism. Half will have an EHC plan identifying the need for a specialist place.

Sunderland Council has received planning applications for 8,200 new homes (4,823 to be delivered by 2021) which will yield a further estimated 51 school aged children with Autism (half having an EHC plan). In addition to immediate requirements for 55 places for 5 – 16 year olds, a further 35 places will be required to meet these increased birth-rate and development requirements.

The number of children with Autism whose needs can be met within the mainstream sector is also rising proportionally to the school age population. Creation of additional specialist places will ensure those who are best suited to a specialist provision are more appropriately placed and will free up central resources within the mainstream sector to more effectively meet the needs of the remaining cohort, reducing exclusions and PRU requirements.

Sunderland's specialist schools' provide Autism places to children from neighbouring councils. The demand for places doubled from Durham and South Tyneside between 12/13 and 15/16, with the majority of demand within the oversubscribed secondary sector. The new school would enable neighbouring local authorities to commission additional places. Neighbouring LAs have expressed an interest in commissioning of places but the volume of demand has not yet been quantified.

Places will be funded in the first instance through Growth Fund. On-going demand for places will generate sufficient revenue to enable the new school to remain sustainable. The Council's requirement to seek external day placements, independent places or external residential placements will also be reduced; decreasing pressure on the high needs block. Neighbouring local authorities who commission places at the new school will see the same benefits.

D2: Trends in your specialist provision for all children with EHC plans

Please use the table below to describe the recent, current and projected trends of specialist provision that caters for **children with EHC plans living in your LA(s), of the age range for which you want the new school** (drawing upon [SEN2 Data](#)). If this is a joint bid, ie. other LAs are committed to commissioning places, either fill in the table once for the LAs together, or copy/paste the table and fill it in for each LA (please say which you have done). **The projected data for 2020 should show the pattern you expect if this EOI is successful.**

	No. of Settings	Please indicate the no. of pupils with an EHC plan living in your LA who are placed within these settings		
		2012	2016 (as at Sep 2016)	2020
Resourced provision and units inside LA	14	131	193	208
Resourced provision and units outside LA	1	1	2	2
Special schools (either maintained or academies) inside LA	7	563	695	749
Special schools (either maintained or academies) outside LA	12	16	22	24
Independent / non-maintained special schools inside LA	3	3	5	5
Independent / non-maintained special schools outside LA	7	19	20	22
Mainstream schools inside LA	110	310	252	271
Mainstream schools outside LA	7	7	4	4
General FE colleges (if relevant) inside LA	1	*	60 **	65
General FE colleges (if relevant) outside LA	5	*	30 **	32
Specialist FE providers (if relevant) inside LA	1	*	3	3
Specialist FE providers (if relevant) outside LA	2	*	7	8

Please provide a brief explanation of any recent trends and the rationale for future projections [200 words max.]

Projections included in D1 are minimum projections based on current 2016 support ratios. This assumes the 1.8% of the school age population receiving additional support for an ASD need will not increase. However, the average increase in the proportion of ASD Pupils requiring specialist support in Sunderland has grown by 0.2% in each of the previous 4 years (2012/13 – 2015/16. It is therefore realistic to assume growth will continue at a similar level (a moderate estimation is that by 2020 around 2.4% of the school age population will receive SEN support for an ASD aim with half having an EHC plan). Based on birth-rate data (before housing projections are incorporated) this will result in an increase from 649 children to 887 by 2020). When housing is included this increases by 40 to 927 children with approximately 463 in receipt of an EHC Plan.

Similarly D2 assumes the 2016 ratios will remain constant. However, when the growth in requirements between 2012 – 16 (32%) is applied to the 2020 cohort this increases projected demand for specialist school places within LA from 749 to 891.

No further expansions of existing ASD school sites in Sunderland are possible. No new free schools are currently proposed.

Confirmation

I confirm that the Director of Children's Services at **Sunderland City Council** has seen this expression of interest and supports it.

Please tick to confirm

Date (11/11/2016)	
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