
Consultation on the use of Special Needs Funding

Background

The Department for Education has allocated a capital grant to Portsmouth City Council of £537,600. The purpose of this grant is to support the creation of places and to improve provision and facilities for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This capital investment must be used to adapt or create special school buildings within the city to meet the needs of pupils being referred to them.

Pupil Numbers

There are an increasing number of pupils in the city with complex and complex plus special education needs.

Complex pupils are predominantly ambulant with a range of needs (Severe Learning Difficulties, Moderate Learning Difficulties, and Autistic Spectrum Disorder) with pupils taught together in groups of 8 to 12; there are often a few places for pupils with greater needs such as those associated with severe autism or Social and Emotional Mental Health who are taught in smaller groups with a higher staff to pupil ratio.

Complex plus pupils are generally non-ambulant requiring specialist equipment and facilities; for example, pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties Severe Learning Difficulties/autism are taught in groups of 8 to 10 pupils, with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties or severe autism being taught in groups of 4 to 6.

A significant increase in demand is forecast for pupils with complex plus needs who would require a place at a specialist education facility. There are also rising numbers of complex pupils. It is predicted that, by 2023, Portsmouth would have a shortage of at least 100 places.

There is already an urgent demand for complex plus places for September 2019 which cannot be met in the city without investing in a temporary solution.

Proposal

It is proposed that the funding is used for two specific purposes:

- A SEND Accommodation Study is undertaken to develop an accommodation strategy for the next decade, with a view to the report supporting the business case for a new Portsmouth special school which will provide for complex and complex plus pupils.
- Creating temporary accommodation for complex plus pupils for September 2019. This would be achieved by refurbishing the ground floor of the old "Harbour Fratton" site as a temporary location until a new school is built

Consultation

The Council sought the views of residents, especially parents of pupils with SEND, pupils with SEND, and school/academies. This included Portsmouth Parent Voice, and Dynamite (group for SEND pupils). The consultation period was May 3rd 2019 - May 24th 2019.

Consultation Responses

Two responses were received. Responses are highlighted in italics.

1. A response was received from **Dynamite**, from a group which comprised a range of needs (anxiety, autism, mild/moderate LD but complex needs):

- General feeling was that this is a good idea.
- Will the provision at the Harbour Fratton site still be known as Harbour Fratton or will there be some rebranding, as people think of Harbour Fratton as the school for students who have been excluded from other schools? There is stigma attached to the name and young people with SEND sometimes feel that they are lumped in with young people who misbehave.

Response: The provision will be called The Lantern.

- The study to look at a new special school should also look at how young people with different needs are mixed within classes at special schools and if this has an effect on attainment (e.g. young people not being able to keep up with work which they find too difficult but other students are able to do, and the other way around with students not being able to achieve higher qualifications because other students aren't working at their level).

Response: The study is looking at overall numbers and determining what accommodation is needed for SEND pupils in Portsmouth. The comments about how provision is delivered will be passed to the SEND team to consider as they work with schools.

- Benefits of special schools include reduced noise levels and being set work which is at an appropriate level.
- There was a discussion about mainstream schools, feeling from young people who went to mainstream schools that there isn't often an understanding in mainstream schools of SEND and that's a reason people go to special schools.

2. A **member of the public** (parent of a complex SEN child residing in Portsmouth).

Solent Academies trust currently control all SEN schools and nurseries within Portsmouth – this is an unethical monopoly over services that when there is an issue, for example with the exec head teacher or EHCP, or safeguarding, or any other issue...means parents must seek placements outside of the child's home area/local authority in order to ensure positive working relationships with educators.

It would be prudent of [the council] to have a local authority maintained special school to provide choice an alternatives within the local authority area that those children who will not thrive under the Solent Academies Trust ethos have alternative suitable, monitored, accountable provision.

Response: The council cannot open a local authority maintained school as this is not allowed under the legislation. However, the council could seek to open a free school, which would be an academy. There would be an open competition to determine which Trust would manage the academy when it opens.

Conclusion - The consultation responses support the proposal.