

Children and Lifelong Learnings Scrutiny Panel

DATE	25/01/2024
REPORT OF	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities -Progress of awarded Specialist Free School
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The Council has a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure the provision of sufficient and suitable pupil places for its children.

Analysis of current and future educational need for children with Special Educational Need and Disabilities (SEND) who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has identified future shortfalls of sufficient numbers and suitable local education Resource Specialist Provision pupil places to meet current and future predicted needs. There is a need to create and fund local places to prevent children and young people going out of area and remain educated in their local community.

The awarded new SEMH free school will contribute directly towards the Council's strategic priority of supporting the development of 'Stronger Communities' by providing a fit for purpose new school reducing the need to send our children out of area, which continues to support communities across the Borough.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Currently the activity around SEND is to mitigate a £54million predicted overspend on the High Needs Block by 2028.

One of the key activities is the SEMH free school awarded by the DfE in March 2023 (National programme)

The report outlines progress to date in delivery of the project.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

This report is being presented as an update as requested by the panel.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

SEMH Free School

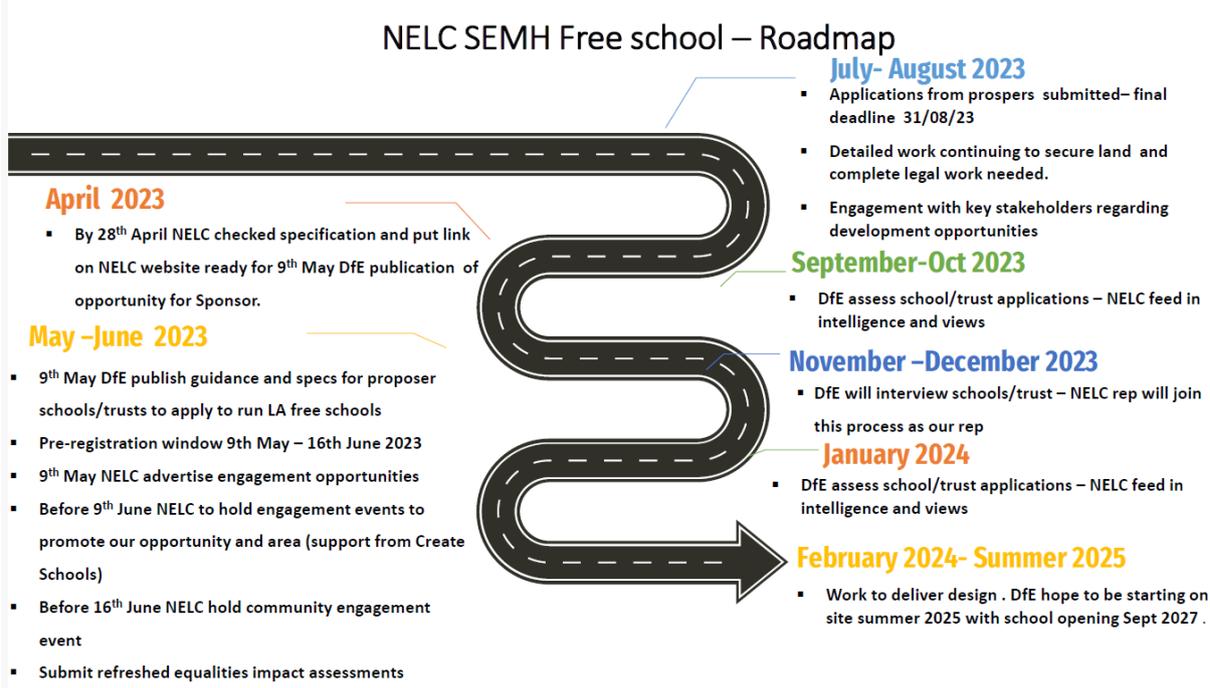
Local Authority officers have been working with central DfE colleagues to prepare the identified land, both in terms of securing a lease from Lincolnshire Housing Partnership (LHP) as well as completing required land surveys on the identified site. A range of Local Authority officers met with the DfE at Open Door in June 23 and walked around the proposed school site. DfE were impressed with work undertaken in preparation and moved the project forward for delivery.

Following a pause in work during September and October, due to the concrete in schools issue the project meetings are back on track and the land for the site is currently being transferred to the Local Authority. DfE are keen to move forward and have now appointed their project manager and Technical Advisor team who are

undertaking feasibility stage currently. The outcome of this stage and signing of funding agreements are due May 24. The Local Authority are aware of its responsibilities to fund costs associated with the land and are awaiting for the feasibility analysis outcome to inform the costs for further negotiation with DfE. This will be a critical milestone.

Recruitment is underway for a Multi-Academy Trust to sponsor the school. Shortlisting has taken place and interviews are taking place in January 2024. This is a central Department for Education process, where the Local Authority have a place on the panel. It is estimated that a Trust will be appointed by the end of January 2024.

Roadmap of activity:



2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Whilst the Department for Education are managing the risks for this programme, they face similar challenges in procuring contractors to Local Authority’s. The market at present continues to be saturated with large building contracts, where costs continue to rise.

The national issue in September about RAAC has diverted resource away from other projects, but the Local Authority remain hopeful that the funding agreement for the build remains on track to be signed by May 2024.

The current site costs are being identified and these will hopefully be within current estimated budget. Further negotiation may be needed with DfE. There is a significant positive long term revenue cost avoidance benefit realisation for delivering the new free specialist school.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The positive benefit to the Council's reputation will be the continued availability of sufficient and suitable pupil places for the children and young people with SEND with EHCP's of the Borough within their own locality in fit for purpose educational places.

The local offer page provides a communication page specifically for SEND for parents, professionals and other stakeholders. There will be a dedicated section developed which will be regularly updated with how plans are progressing. Regular updates on the SEND agenda are provided to headteachers, SENCos and Early Years settings.

Parent Carer forum meet regularly with LA and health officers, where updates will be shared and discussed with representatives from the forum to feedback to their wider membership.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The free school build is being funded through the Department for Education programme, with a small amount of remedial work required to be undertaken by the Local Authority on the identified land.

Revenue funding for the free school will be funded through the High Needs Block but will replace (in part) the funding already committed to the commissioning of Independent non-maintained special schools and bespoke packages of education.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The new special school will improve outcomes for children with SEND in North East Lincolnshire by increasing the range and type of education provision available locally, keeping children in their communities, as well as improving access to services.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Local Authority are committed to building wherever possible carbon neutral schools and provision, to also reducing transport costs to reduce environmental impacts of transporting children and young people out of the area

7. MONITORING COMMENTS

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result, no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

8. WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards affected as children with SEND live and attend schools across place NEL.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[New Special Free School | NELC \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](http://nelincs.gov.uk)

10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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