

CABINET

DATE	11 th June 2025
REPORT OF	Councillor Margaret Cracknell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Split Site Solution for Humberston Park Special School
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 06/25/06

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.

The identified Basic Need scheme (provision of new pupil places) will also contribute directly towards the Council's strategic priority of supporting the development of 'Stronger Communities' by providing a fit for purpose service model aligned to the use of physical property which continues to support communities across the Borough.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks authority to implement the recommendations of approving the proposed Basic Need Capital Scheme Split Site Solution for Humberston Park Special School, which addresses shortfall in provision and creates additional school places.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approves and delegates to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education authority to implement the captured Capital Basic Need Scheme to address the shortfall of special school pupil places to ensure that the Local Authority has sufficient and suitable school places to meet its statutory responsibility in accordance with the Education Act 1996 and to take any ancillary actions reasonably arising.
2. Authorises the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education and the Executive Director Place and Resources, to acquire and return to the Council's education stock, the former Nunthorpe School on Sutcliffe Avenue, to create a split site provision for Humberston Park Special School.
3. Authorises the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education to undertake a refurbishment programme

of the Nunsthorpe site post-acquisition to create a dedicated secondary and 6th form campus for the cohort of Humberston Park Special School. .

4. Authorises the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education to commence any required procurement exercise in connection with such refurbishment and thereafter award, mobilise and implement the contract with enablement to deal with all issues reasonably arising.
5. Authorises the Assistant Director Law and Governance to execute any documentation arising.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that it has sufficient and suitable pupil places as set out in the Education Act for its citizens.

Humberston Park Special School is a through 4 to 19 provider located in St Thomas Close. In 2024 the Department for Education (DfE) issued a mechanism for Councils to be able to consistently assess special school net capacities. The DfE have undertaken net capacity assessments on all special schools in the country, and the Council's assessment using the new guidance, undertaken in consultation with Humberston Park Academy aligns with the DfE's assessment of 106 places.

The cohort of pupils at Humberston Park have complex medical and physical needs, resulting in additional large pieces of equipment and a higher staffing ratio (circa 2 staff to every pupil). Currently the academy has circa 140 pupils on site in a building that now has a verified net capacity for only 106 pupils. Due to the lack of capacity the school is now in a position where it is no longer running its nursery offer and indicates that it cannot accept any new pupils until 2029. Both the Council and the school are aware of pupils in the borough to whom the provider cannot offer a place to, due to insufficient accommodation on a restricted site.

The new assessment mechanism leaves the Council with an immediate and significant shortfall of suitable and sufficient specialist pupil places, as the St Thomas site is oversubscribed. It is also noted that it is unsuitable for secondary education to meet the immediate and longer-term demand for specialist places, and a reduction of circa 34 places will exacerbate this issue further resulting in more pupils having to seek places in out-of-borough provision. In addition to the over subscription, the Council notes the identified shortfalls of secondary and 6th form provision, all of which, as captured in the DfE's document titled, The Schedule of Accommodation, secondary and 6th form pupils should have access to.

A cost-effective opportunity has come forward for the Council to take back into its education estate the former Nunsthorpe School, which the Council sold to the Grimsby Institute in 2004 as they had an education need. The Institute currently has been running its Animal Husbandry modules from the site, but it

is due to vacate the building by September 2025 into new purpose-built accommodation upon the main campus site at Nunns Corner, leaving an empty former school building with an education covenant on the land. The Institute has approached the Council to enquire if we have an educational need for the building and are willing to negotiate a sale of the site back to the Council for continued education use.

The site is in reasonable condition and has been maintained in most areas, and after some infrastructure refurbishment and adaptations, it would be a suitable split special school site for the existing secondary and 6th form cohort of Humberston Park St Thomas Close site, as well as welcoming additional pupils who currently are unable to attend a special school setting in the borough due to a shortfall of available places.

The scheme would release the current secondary and 6th form space at the Humberston Park St Thomas Close site enabling the provision to offer additional specialist nursery and primary places.

The additional places across the two sites that this scheme would create would allow for pupils who are currently in Education Other than in School (EOTAS) or travelling out of area for specialist education places, at a cost of circa £60k each per year, to be taught within the borough.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1. The Council has a statutory duty for ensuring that it has sufficient and suitable pupil places for the pupils of North East Lincolnshire. The Council is currently facing challenges in evidencing its compliance with its statutory duty of ensuring the provision of sufficient and suitable places for some of its most vulnerable cohort of pupils. Under section 42 of the Education Act, the Local Authority have a statutory duty to secure such provision.
- 1.2. The Special School site at St Thomas Close was formerly a primary school and does not lend itself to a suitable environment for its current secondary and 6th form cohort. There are significant shortfalls in specialist rooms and it is currently unable to fully meet its curriculum requirements because of insufficient space. In addition, the Council is not meeting the educational needs of some of its pupil cohort due to the lack of specialist school places available in the borough.
- 1.3. The SENDAP Sufficiency strategy approved by Cabinet and launched in July 2024, outlines that both the number and type of placements required for children with EHCPs needs to grow. This project aligns to the strategy. Developing a split site setting will help future proof the number of places required for children with multiple, complex and profound needs in the borough.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

- 2.1 By not reacting proactively to the increased demand for localised provision of special school places, the Council may find itself in a position of having insufficient and unsuitable pupil places, thus not meeting its statutory duty set

out in the Education Act 1996.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 The option of taking back the site into the Council's education stock and refurbishing is a cost-effective solution to ensuring the provision of sufficient and suitable special school places for the Council.
- 3.2. The option of a new build would involve the securing of land for education purposes that is able to house a 200-place new special school and the build cost would need to be met by the Council.
- 3.3. The option of do nothing and continue to fund out-of-county places and transport costs as demand outstrips its supply of places is not recommended due to increasing pressure on the High Needs Block of the Designated School Grant.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The positive benefit to the Council's reputation will be the continued availability of sufficient and suitable special school pupil places for the children of the Borough within their own locality in fit for purpose school buildings.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Within the current approved Schools Capital Programme, the programme has a corporate resource allocation of circa £9m. This ask has been reduced to currently £3m due to a Government Basic Need Allocation and secured S106 contributions being utilised against approved schemes in the programme. This urgent Basic Need scheme will utilise £4.5m of the approved Corporate Resource allocation within the existing programme and will be further supported with a £1.5m contribution from the High Needs Capital Grant.

The average cost of a child being taught out of county for the Council is £60k per pupil. This sum would significantly reduce if there were provision available in the borough.

As the building will be transferred to the Academy once the Council has completed its refurbishment within its agreed funding envelope, all future capital investment the site may require (outside of the Council's statutory responsibility around the provision of suitable and sufficient pupil places and any changes to the Academy Act) will need to be sourced by the Academy and not the Council.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

There is a statutory call upon Local Authorities to ensure the provision of sufficient and suitable pupil places for its residents. By approving the capital spend and scheme, pupils and staff benefit from a 21st century school environment, which increases aspirations and curriculum opportunities for pupils and provides localised provision.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Local Authority are committed to building wherever possible carbon neutral schools.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

The School Organisation Plan was presented to Scrutiny January 2019 and captured within the plan is the need to grow education sites in line with demand for new pupil places. Whilst this emerging urgent scheme is not captured within the plan, the Council's statutory responsibility of the provision of sufficient and suitable places is.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The proposed capital scheme will be funded through a combination of corporate resource and existing high needs capital grant funding at a total of £6.0M
- 9.2. scheme will increase in-borough special school places, realising an average annual saving of around £31k per place, excluding transport costs, against alternative settings out of borough.
- 9.3. Special school places are funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant, which is currently in a deficit, this proposal will help to mitigate further pressures against that position. Education transport costs are funded through core budget, in-borough provision will avoid increasing costs in this area.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The demand outstripping supply of special education places are well-rehearsed, as is the additional cost of out of area placements. The Council has a statutory duty, as outlined in the above report, to ensure sufficiency. The scheme described will ameliorate the current position, better positioning the Council to meet its obligations.
- 10.2. The legal implications arising are around the acquisition of the subject site and ultimate disposal by way of lease back to the Academy once refurbished. Further, the anticipated procurement exercise in connection with the anticipated refurbishment program. Legal Services will support colleagues in the completion of these requirements.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications arising from the contents of this report.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

All wards within the borough

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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Wendy Jackson, Deputy Director of Service for Schools, Standards and
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