

**NEW SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN  
WITH  
AUTISTIC SPECTRUM CONDITIONS (ASC)  
IN CHESHIRE EAST**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

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**August 2012**

## 1. Cheshire East

Cheshire East Council came into being in April 2009 when Cheshire County Council was disaggregated and two new unitary authorities were formed.

Cheshire East has a diverse, rural and urban profile. The area is classed as significantly rural with more than half the population living in rural or rural market town areas. The other 8 towns, although urban, have outskirts which contain areas classified as more rural than urban.

The population in Cheshire East has steadily increased over the past nineteen years, from 340,500 in 1991 to 363,800 in 2010 – an increase of 7%.

Educational attainments amongst school pupils in terms of achieving 5 or more GCSE grades at A\*- C grade is above the national average. Cheshire East schools generally perform well; Children get off to a good start with a large percentage of childcare establishments, nursery education and primary schools judged to better than similar areas and better than standards found nationally.

In 2010 Cheshire East began an extensive Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Review of its specialist services for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

One of the key recommendations from the review was the identified need to develop local specialist provision for children with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) between the ages of 4 to 19.

Cheshire East Councils aspiration is to develop an outstanding/excellent ASC-specific Special School for children with ASC as close to their local community as possible, underpinned by our vision that 'no child, or young person is left behind', enabling every child and young person to achieve the best possible outcomes.

This document should be read in conjunction with the School Specification Document and submissions must be made using the Cheshire East Council Application Form. Please see Section 8 for further information.

## 2. Pupil Profile

All pupils placed in the Special School will typically present with the following:

- Significant levels of social isolation due to their degree of social impairment and/or limited understanding of social signals, for example facial expressions and emotions, and rules such as two way conversations
- Severe levels of anxiety caused by changes in routine requiring adult intervention
- Repetitive behaviours which impact on learning
- The need for autism specific strategies, such as additional structure, distraction free work spaces to enable access to the curriculum
- Severe sensory difficulties impeding learning and socialisation and/or fine and gross motor difficulties, which are exacerbated in a busy classroom environment

The children and young people attending the ASC-specific Special School will need to fulfil the following admissions criteria:

- A statement of Special Educational Needs
- A diagnosis of an Autistic Spectrum Condition as either a primary or secondary need with the recognition that ASC is a significant barrier/inhibitor to their access the curriculum, or
- Recognition from the professionals working with the pupil that a social communication disorder is a major barrier to learning.
- The ability to progress academically given the appropriate ASC-specific support and strategies. For example, by the end of key stage 2, students whose needs would be met by the ASC-specific special school will be working at National Curriculum Level 2 in at least one of the core subjects. They will not be identified as having severe learning difficulties.
- Difficulty in accessing a successful education within a mainstream environment (including resourced schools at both primary and secondary level)
- Severe difficulties with the understanding and use of language in addition to higher level language difficulties that are subtle and pervasive and result in misunderstandings requiring specific programmes of work. They may be non-verbal and use alternative methods of communication. This would not include pupils with identified speech and language disorders.

It is anticipated that the pupils will come from a variety of school or pre-school placements. This may include:

- Out of borough placements, either inter-authority or independent specialist schools,
- Resourced school, either primary or secondary
- Pre-school placements, where their needs have already been identified

### **3. Current Educational Provision**

Cheshire East Council currently has limited accommodation for pupils on the autistic spectrum. The creation of Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester meant that the special schools designated for pupils on the spectrum all fell within Cheshire West and Chester.

Cheshire East does however, have successful resourced provision for pupils on the spectrum in two high schools and four primary schools. Pupils in mainstream schools in Cheshire East are also supported by the Cheshire East Autism Team which is a multi agency team offering advice and support to schools and parents on the needs of their autistic children. The two special schools for pupils with severe learning difficulties are able to accommodate pupils on the autistic spectrum who have a severe learning difficulty.

As a consequence a significant number of pupils identified as being on the autistic spectrum are educated in 'out of borough placements' which incur significant costs to the borough in fees and transport.

The need to develop local specialist provision for children with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) between the ages of 4 to 19 was identified as a key recommendation in the recent SEND Review in Cheshire East.

#### **4. Rationale and Evidence of Demand**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum, both nationally and in Cheshire East. This increase may be partially explained by improved awareness and increased diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Conditions.

ASC is of high incidence nationally with 16% of statements having ASC as the primary category of need. In Cheshire East the percentage is higher.

The SEND Review identified a gap in educational provision for children and young people with ASC, whose needs are not currently being met in mainstream schools, resourced provision or non ASC-specific special schools and hence are placed in ASC-specific provision out of borough. We do not have an ASC-specific special school in Cheshire East to provide these pupils with an appropriate placement.

The current provision of four resourced primary schools and two resourced secondary schools, within Cheshire East does not meet the continuum of provision required for children and young people affected by autism or offer much parental choice.

Children and young people accessing ASC-specific provision out of borough are travelling to Cheshire West, Staffordshire, Stockport, and small percentages attend independent specialist schools and residential care across the country.

The Children and Young Peoples Database (CYPD) figures for 2010/11 indicate 85 children and young people were placed in ASC-specific out of borough placements, at a cost of £2.5 million, with an additional travel cost for these pupils of £0.4 million. The cost for these out of borough placements for ASC-specific provision funded by Education was £2.9 million. In addition, Health contributed £59,000 and Social Services contributed a further £0.5 million. The overall sum for ASC-specific out of borough placement for 2010/11 was £3.4million.

Parents of children with ASC are concerned that Cheshire East is unable to provide a continuum of provision for their children and young people.

ASC affects communication, social interaction and the ability to think flexibly. Many of our children with ASC need a highly structured adapted environment, and become too stressed to learn if overloaded with information and faced with choices and changes. This environment is difficult to create within a mainstream school, and inconsistent with the needs of most 'neuro-typical' children.

Given the above, and the increasing diagnostic trends for ASC and local parental interest in an ASC-specific Special school, there is a strong case and demand for establishing an ASC-specific Special School within Cheshire East.

It is envisaged that the proposed school will be an innovative model that will provide a continuum of effective provision, better value for money, supporting a more buoyant market with greater parental choice and flexibility than the current status quo.

Cheshire East Council is committed to providing an 'enhanced' local offer which ensures each child and young person with ASC is able to cope with the world and is given every opportunity to develop the skills needed to cope within today's social networks.

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## 5. The Local Authority's Planned Response to Meeting the Educational Needs of Pupils on the autistic spectrum in Cheshire East

### Premises

The preferred identified site is the former Church Lawton School near Alsager, Cheshire. The site is centrally located in Cheshire East and is easily accessible via the motorway minimising journey times for pupils, and their families. The current proposal is for the existing redundant school building to be demolished and a purpose built ASC – specific Special School to be constructed on the site.

The site is depicted below:



In order to meet the estimated opening date of November/December 2013 the school design and build process is already underway. Sponsors will not, therefore, have the opportunity for detailed involvement in the design of the school building.

The building will provide a physical environment within which a calm and structured approach to learning is promoted. For children and young people affected by autism, the control of sensory stimulation and distraction is imperative. This needs to be recognised in all aspects of the design of the building to maximise learning and to reduce stress.

Drawing: P3368-010  
Scale: 1:500 @ A3  
Date: 17/07/2012

**+ Advantages**  
functionally and operationally strong

**- Disadvantages**  
removal of trees  
retaining walls



The above diagram shows the current thinking behind the design of the school.



## **6. Funding**

The Local Authority's officers will negotiate S106 / CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) agreements with the developers in consultation with Cheshire East Borough Council. Negotiations will be undertaken on the basis of land for the school site being provided by Cheshire East Borough Council and the capital cost of the buildings. The capital costs for the school is estimated at £4 million.

As this new school will be an Academy or Free School, the successful sponsor of the school will need to enter into a revenue funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education.

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## **7. Process for Establishing New Schools**

The Education Act (2011) states that when a Local Authority identifies the need for a new school, that this school should be promoted as either an Academy or a Free School. The Local Authority is required to publish a notice inviting proposals to this effect and to specify a date for academy / free school proposals to be received. After that date, the Local Authority should forward all proposals received to the Secretary of State outlining the steps taken to secure the proposals together with the details of any academy / free school proposals received, or, if no proposals have been received.

Potential sponsors of the new school will be expected to present their proposals at a meeting with County Councillors (Members) and Local Authority officers to discuss their proposals in detail.

Following detailed consideration of all of the information available to them, the Members and officers concerned will reach a view on which, if any, of the applications received they would prefer to see implemented. A report on the conclusions reached will then be presented to the next available meeting of the Council's Cabinet (its decision-making body).

It is important to note that whilst the Local Authority is able to state a preference in respect of which application it would wish to see implemented, it is the Secretary of State for Education who will make the final decision and select the successful sponsor.

If none of the proposals are acceptable to the Secretary of State for Education, then the Local Authority will embark on a school competition process based on the guidelines to establish a new maintained mainstream school as set out in section 7 (1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The key milestones for establishing the new ASC-specific Special School for Cheshire East are set out below:

Once advised of the outcome of the Secretary of State's consideration of the applications, the Local Authority will publicise this information on its website and via other media / communication channels and begin the process of working with the successful sponsor to establish the new primary school.

## **8. Further Details and Application Form**

Proposals should be submitted using Cheshire East Council Specification Document and Application Form available to download at:

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If you would like any further information, or would like to discuss your application in detail, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at:

**Completed Application Forms must be submitted by:**

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