

# School Organisation Consultation

## The Future of Special Support Centres in Suffolk

### 1. Background

The Local Authority has a duty to keep SEN provision under review to ensure that the local offer is delivering the best possible outcomes for the local children, young people, families and schools that it serves. Over the last year, there has been an on-going dialogue between local special school head teachers, PRU Head teachers, mainstream school head teachers and the Local Authority to look at the collective challenges that currently face Special Educational Needs (SEND) provision in Suffolk. These challenges include the changing needs of learners with complex and/ or SEND in Suffolk and the increasing number of learners needing to be educated in non-Suffolk educational settings.

In Suffolk there are seven Special support centres (SSCs), which are currently commissioned to provide 108 places for learners between the ages of 5-11, who require access to specialised local provision. Special Support Centres (SSCs) are subject to inspection by OFSTED as part of the relevant host school's inspection process. In recent years for a number of reasons there has been a reduction in the numbers of SSCs operating in Suffolk.

The LA duty to periodically review the local SEN offer is required to ensure that the offer remains fit for purpose and continues to meet needs. The local offer consists of a range of provision which includes special schools, mainstream school SEND provision and SSCs. Local stakeholder groups have recently considered the changing in demographic and primary needs of alternative provision. It is clear from the evidence that there is a need to redesign the local offer to ensure that it is optimally responsive to the needs of local stakeholders, including children and young people with additional needs.

Whilst the proportion of learners with a statement has remained roughly the same in Suffolk in recent years, there has been a general shift in the primary need of children with a statement. There has been a shift from children with Learning Difficulties being overrepresented in the statistics to children with Behaviour Emotional and Social Difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Speech, Language and Communication Needs. The change to the profile of need requires the LA with the support of local schools and partners to seek an integrated solution in order to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and young people; solutions that remain innovative, contemporary, but yet sustainable.

As more and more children present with conditions that 'co-exist' the range of support strategies required to enable learners to participate actively in the classroom and the wider community becomes more complex. Suffolk County Council remains keen to

work with all stakeholders on the development of securing the best possible future delivery model for the work of all specialist provision, including that of the County's remaining seven special support centres.

## **2. Rationale**

The Local Authority in seeking to secure the best possible outcomes for all local children, young people, families and schools has a duty to ensure that all available resources are used equitably, efficiently and effectively. Currently it could be considered that whilst having a number of positive features that the SSC provision model fails to consistently deliver best possible outcomes for the learners that they provide for. The evidence suggests that there are variable outcomes for the learners that access these settings. As a result the local authority is duty bound to evaluate with the support of our partners, the potential to redeploy the resources in a different way that is efficient, effective and equitable.

Of the seven SSCs that remain in Suffolk there is a disproportionate number (6) that are situated in the Ipswich and Felixstowe localities, with only one SSC in the West of the County based in Sudbury. There are no SSCs in the North of the County. The current SSC arrangements are therefore inequitable and further support the assertion that resources are not being used optimally efficiently or effectively.

The total funded places in the seven SSC settings equates to approximately £1.4m per financial year. The current level of unfilled places in these settings is costing in excess of £250,000 from the High Needs Funding Block. Given the pressure on SEN funding it would be timely to review how the current SEN budget (including that of SSC investment) might be used more efficiently and equitably. It is imperative that we explore if there is scope to secure better outcomes for the learners currently accessing the provision through alternative approaches.

## **3. Stakeholder Engagement and Views**

We are seeking the views and comments from interested parties about proposals that work towards redesigning or closing the remaining seven special support centres (SSCs) with effect from 31 August 2015.

The Suffolk Schools' Forum agreed on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to progress plans to explore the potential to redesign, reconfigure or decommission the work of the seven remaining SSCs in Suffolk, from the current delivery model with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 onwards. These proposals could lead to several options needing to be considered by local stakeholders for each, some or all of the SSCs:

1. Reconfiguration and/ or extend the remit of the provision.
2. Amalgamate provision where appropriate.
3. Changing of provision designation.

#### 4. Potential closure.

Prior to any of these proposals being progressed in any capacity there will be the need for a formal consultation process and any subsequent new arrangements for securing education provision for affected pupils will need to be evaluated.

Whilst consulting on these proposals, the County Council is aware that it continues to have a statutory duty “to make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school, for children of compulsory school age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, will not receive a suitable education without those arrangements” (Education Act 1996, Section 19).

#### **4. Staffing Implications**

If there are changes or closures to the work of SSC provision, there may be the potential for staff redundancies or for any changes to affect the terms and conditions for some staff. Any redundancy process and staff consultations cannot take place until a decision has been made to proceed with these proposals. Initial stakeholder consultation will last until 9 March 2015. If the planned proposal to reconfigure, amalgamate or decommission is progressed in its current form, then the earliest any staff could be affected would be from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 onwards. Staff would be given notice in time for formal notice to be served by this date and this would be up to a maximum period depending on their previous length of continuous service. Where required every effort will be made to redeploy existing staff in other roles around the County provided that they meet the necessary requirements.

No staff can be made vulnerable to redundancy or changes in terms and conditions until any decision has been formally approved to change or decommission the school SSC. The initial decision to proceed with extended consultation will not be taken until May 2015. Thereafter there will be a further consultation process with all potentially affected staff and Trade Unions / Professional Associations which will take the form, most probably, of a series of meetings both as whole schools and then individual groups. This would involve precise proposals on how staff reductions will be brought about and staff whose posts are vulnerable are notified in writing at this time.

There will be stakeholder meetings held in each SSC (date for each SSC to be confirmed) to discuss the proposals and operational implications of these decisions, albeit not on an individual level. The Local Authority will be meeting with Union and Professional Associations to keep them informed of the proposals and information will be provided to staff that may be vulnerable to redundancy throughout the process. Contact details for personnel support officers will be given to staff at this meeting so that staff can talk about their individual circumstances with someone in person at appropriate points during and after consultation.

## **5. Relevant timescales and milestones**

**9 February, 2015**– Outline stakeholder consultation commences;

**9 March, 2015** – Deadline for consultation response forms to be returned. Please see the form below for details of how to complete the form and who to send it to;

**8-11 May** – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People will determine whether to proceed to publish a public notice regarding this proposal;

**11 May** – If the decision is to proceed, then a public notice will be written and published at any affected schools and local communities;

**18 May** – Cabinet Member for Children and Young People will determine whether to proceed to publish a public notice regarding this proposal;

**22 May - 19 June** – Following a published notice, there will be a further 4-week period whereby people can make representations to the Council that can be both objections as well as expressions of support for the proposals. This is the final opportunity for people and organisations to make their views known;

**19-22 June 2015** - Cabinet Member for Children and Families will consider any representations in response to the notice and will decide whether to proceed with the proposal or not;

**22 June to 20 July 2015**– should a decision be made to reconfigure, amalgamate or decommission provision, then a formal four week staffing consultation process would take place including identification of staff that would be vulnerable to redundancy or changes in terms and conditions;

**1 Sept 2015**– If the decision is made to proceed with any of the change options, this is the notice date from when the affected SSCs will be expected to be working towards being reconfigured, amalgamated or decommissioned in line with final decisions made on the future of the provision



4. Please tell us about yourself by populating the boxes below that apply to you.

Name of school SSC that you may have an interest	
A pupil at the school	
A parent/carer of a child at the school	
A parent/carer of a child that may go to the school in the future	
A current Governor of the school	
A member of staff at the school	
Someone else with an interest in the school	

**For further information about this proposal**

For further information please contact Paul Senior on the contact details below:

Email: [paul.senior@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:paul.senior@suffolk.gov.uk)

Address: Suffolk County Council, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX

Consultation forms to be returned by 9th March 2015

**The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People at Suffolk County Council, is responsible for formally approving the planned decision