



Department  
for Education

# **Leicestershire Special Free School**

**Contextual information for applicant  
groups applying to open a new  
Special Free School**

**Leicestershire County Council**

**May 2023**

## OVERVIEW

The Department for Education is inviting applications from proposer groups to open a new special free school in Leicestershire.

Applicant groups can access the key school specification information, along with the full 'How to Apply' guidance, on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk). You should read these documents carefully before completing mandatory pre-registration.

The school specification document sets out the key factual details about the proposed school, including the proposed size, SEND designation, age range, suggested top-up funding, and proposed site.

**This document** provides applicant groups with additional contextual information provided by Leicestershire County Council, which includes:

- The rationale, context and need for the school;
- Details on the commissioning of places, including the involvement of any other LAs commissioning places;
- A brief description of the existing provision in the area;
- Future expected growth in pupil numbers; and
- How the LA expects places within the school to be filled.

## **RATIONALE, CONTEXT AND NEED FOR THE SCHOOL, INCLUDING PROPOSED COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS**

Increasing demand for Specialist provision is not matched by our current provision available:

View the [2020-2023 SEND Strategy](#).

This was developed in close liaison with current providers, parents and carers and the West Leicestershire and East Leicestershire and Rutland Clinical Commissioning Groups. The Leicestershire SEND Hub is a member of our SEND and Inclusion Board and is the strategic partner for representing the voice of parents/carers of children and young people with SEND. The SEND and Inclusion Board is made up of education (with strong input from Special School headteachers), health and social care senior managers, schools, the Lead and Deputy Member for children's services and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum.

The joint [Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland \(LLR\) SEND Commissioning Strategy, 2021-24](#), was developed by all three Local Authorities and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) for the area. The strategy contains a high-level vision for joint commissioning that 'we will work together across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND' and a set of priorities for the focus of joint work.

Despite achievements and improvements made as a result of the High Needs Development Programme launched in 2019 significant challenges remain in the Leicestershire SEND system. The current financial position, as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), indicates further deterioration and the in-year deficit has increased for the last three years. Failure to deliver savings is predicted to lead to a cumulative deficit in 2025/26 from £63 million to £84 million, current projections suggest further growth in the deficit. This has led to Leicestershire being invited by the DfE to join the 'Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme'. Reducing the cost of SEN placements would have a significant impact on the financial sustainability of Leicestershire County Council.

Since 2016, there has been a 54% increase in the number of children and young people requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Leicestershire. This compares to a national increase over the same period in England of 38% and 32% in the East Midlands. At the same time, funding, administrative capacity, and availability of high needs places have not increased in line with this local trend, significantly adding pressure to all elements of the local education system. Managing and meeting parental expectations is extremely challenging in this context, leading to an increasing number of parents taking the LA to tribunal and being successful. A review of our SEND strategy and programme to address this situation through analysis, monitoring, creativity, and efficient working is underway, including a continued focus on addressing local sufficiency. A further two resource bases are scheduled to open in Autumn 2023 and expansions have taken place at all five local Area Special Schools (including new satellite bases) to provide an additional 94 places from September 2022. This will not meet existing demand, which is forecast to increase further as population grows.

This forces dependency on unsustainable (educationally and financially) Independent Specialist Provision (ISP). At the start of September 2022 there were 383 young people shown as on roll in an ISP and a further 162 young people for whom specialist provision has been agreed and no place has been identified. In addition, 60 young people are on role in Leicester City special schools. The overall school age population has been on a growth trend for some time and the year 7 cohort in 2022 is the largest ever; this further exacerbates an overall pressure for places. Currently, there are 605 young people in provision outside of Leicestershire's current SEND places available.

### **Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL):**

A new change programme for SEND and inclusion is underway, working with a third-party partner (Newton Europe) commissioned to provide support and challenge to the system, and ensure effective child centred delivery. The Programme builds upon a c£30m investment in creating additional SEND placements within the County. Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) builds on previous activity and will take a broader approach.

It will focus on taking a whole system approach to support inclusion across SEND and mainstream settings, wherever possible.

Central to the programme will be working collaboratively with a wide range of parents, young people, leaders, and staff across the education system (early years, mainstream, specialist provision and Further Education) and health, to design and implement an inclusive system that puts independence, outcomes, and educational achievement at the centre.

### **Parent/Carer and children and young people involvement**

In order to ensure the work undertaken is effective it is critical that not only are children and young people with SEND's needs at the heart of the plan but that they and their parents and carers are involved in the designing and development of the work. This will be achieved through active engagement with a wide range of forums (including the Parent and Carers Forum) across Leicestershire.

A diagnostic was undertaken in late 2021 to understand the challenges and difficulties in the local SEND system and to inform programme planning for the TSIL programme. This identified four key elements to focus on and highlighted some potential actions/activities:

- **Inclusive support in mainstream schools:**

Better understand demand and capacity in the local SEND system, including how best to ensure the right levels of support (for children and young people with different levels of Special Education Needs (SEN) are available in mainstream schools.

Work more closely with mainstream schools to define their offer around inclusion.

Grow the range and improve the quality of inclusive practice in mainstream schools and academies.

- **Statutory support in mainstream setting:**

Understand better the growing demand and number of requests for EHCPs – this will include:

- Better understanding including key drivers in the system.
- Reviewing the department’s processes, including decision-making processes, to ensure that the department is making best use of statutory support in mainstream settings.

Explore the barriers to supporting children with an EHCP and an appropriate level of need in a mainstream setting.

- **Specialist provision:**

Review processes to ensure that children and young people with an EHCP are accessing the right type of specialist support in the right sort of provision at the right time.

Review information available for parents and carers to ensure that information is easily accessible which will include information about the spectrum of support available for children and young people with an EHCP.

- **Effective reviews:**

Review the approach to the way the Children and Family Services department (and other professionals) write, put in place and review EHCPs.

Ensure that the review process maximises opportunities to ensure that provision is meeting need and leading to positive outcomes for all children and young people with an EHCP.

**The TSIL programme commenced on 22 August 2022. As the programme progresses the department will ensure that developments are aligned to the developing SEND Green Paper (‘SEND review: right support, right place, right time’) so that where there are policy changes these are accounted for in programme outcomes. Evidence of Demand**

As a result of housing development projections (which have been at least 96% accurate for 2022 figures) show the number of children and young people with Communication and Interaction identified as a primary need continually growing as follows:

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2026</b>
Charnwood	420	496	513	522
Northwest Leics	233	271	279	285
Melton	125	146	154	156

Natural growth over this period is therefore forecast at 185 in a system which is already beyond capacity. This growth has already begun and consequently there are currently 162 pupils for whom specialist provision has been agreed and no place is available, for whom this is challenging to find provision for.

In the 3 area special schools in north Leicestershire 164 places are taken by pupils with ASD spectrum diagnosis or a moderate learning difficulty. We believe that some of these pupils' needs could be met within the proposed free school, freeing up the area special schools for pupils with more complex needs. We also know from consultation with Leicester and Rutland that there is a need for more C&I places in Leicester, which this site is within reach of. This will contribute to our ambition to reduce and eventually eliminate the need for ISP. Of the 383 across the county pupils in ISP, 191 are in C&I specific provisions, the majority having ASD as primary need, with another 10 more generic needs which this provision could meet. 23 pupils with C&I needs are in Leicester city special schools.

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There is no doubt that this school will quickly be filled if built. This will not solve the sufficiency difficulties in itself but can significantly contribute to reducing our need for ISP. We intend to build lower revenue cost places, which are less of a financial risk and free up higher need places for those children who most need it. If the school is not built there is a risk that the LA will not be able to meet the demand of some pupils with high needs; dependency on high-cost ISP will continue or pupils will be educated at home in some way; the work to keep pupils in or transition pupils back to mainstream settings that will not have the additional capacity and more pupils than otherwise will be in the special needs system.

## **EXISTING PROVISION, EXPECTED FUTURE GROWTH IN PUPIL NUMBERS, AND HOW PLACES IN THE NEW SCHOOL WILL BE FILLED**

The proposal is for a KS2, 3 and 4 special free school, supporting young people in communication and interaction (C&I), with capacity to oversee progression for these pupils into existing Post 16 capacity (specialist or FE), either directly or by overseeing and quality assuring a programme in Alternative Provision. There would be 15 pupils on roll in the school in years 6,7,8,9,10 and 11, meaning 90 places overall.

The free school will be located on an identified site in Charnwood this balances a strategy to place local C&I and SEMH schools in both the north and south of Leicestershire. The site, near Loughborough, has good access to transport links, including to Leicester. It will serve its own Charnwood community but is also within reach of the other two northern districts,

Northwest Leicestershire, and Melton. We believe that it is best for children to be educated in, or as close as possible to, their own community and this also reduces the need for long, expensive, and environmentally harmful lengthy transport provision.

As well as a specific conversation with LLR partners this proposal is based on ongoing consultation with stakeholders through the SEND and Inclusion Board, Joint Commissioning Strategy and wider consultations informing the SEND and Inclusion strategy and the current Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire change management programme.

An underpinning ambition is to reduce and eventually eliminate the need for ISP; based on our current funding structure the new school could result in savings of c£30,000 per place if independent school places are no longer needed (with the aim of increasing this differential and therefore saving), which could be up to £2.7 million a year for this 90 place school compared to current spend.