



Department  
for Education

# **Sheffield Special Free School**

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

**Sheffield City Council and Barnsley  
Metropolitan Borough Council**

**May 2023**

## OVERVIEW

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

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 Sheffield City Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough 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**

This school will be commissioned jointly between Sheffield City Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council Local Authorities (LAs). Places will be split equally in each year group, resulting in 100 places for each LA.

The new school will offer 200 places for children and young people across Sheffield and Barnsley with complex autism and communication needs.

A place will not be reliant on having an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis - strong evidence of complex communication and interaction need through the Education, Health and Care (EHC) process, and being on the pathway for diagnosis will be sufficient.

Children's learning levels will not be suitable for mainstream education, and they may have learning disabilities as secondary needs. Places will also be provided for children who display traits of, or have a diagnosis of, pathological demand avoidance.

Sheffield is the lead authority, as the proposed site is within boundary of Sheffield, although it is an equal distance from Sheffield and Barnsley's respective Town Halls.

We expect the school to develop close working relationships with partners in both Sheffield and Barnsley, so that the school is part of the wider community – in education and beyond.

An agreement will be put in place between the two LAs to manage the commissioning and delivery of this school. All negotiations on issues such as places and funding must take place with both LAs present (this will be covered in the agreement).

The agreement will also cover what happens if one LA does not need all the places. This will likely either mean the other LA commissions the places, or neighbouring LAs are invited to commission them.

For both LAs, this school forms part of the wider inclusion and SEND strategic plan. Both LAs are expecting continued growth and demand for special school places, and this school will have a significant impact in preventing high-cost placements.

For ease, each LA is presented in turn.

### **Sheffield**

#### **Strategic Fit**

The development of this school forms part of Sheffield's Inclusion Strategy.

The Inclusion Strategy was co-produced with stakeholders across the city and has five key themes: assessment, provision, transition, communication, and workforce.

This strategy identified the aim to deliver a new special school in the north of the city two years ago, and this bid is the culmination of that ambition. Through working with our partners in Barnsley, we are seeking to enhance the bid and deliver wider benefits.

The proposed delivery model of the school, with aligned resource provisions and a reintegration pathway, has been put forward to ensure that children who could be in mainstream, are able to access education there. This bid is about enhancing both inclusion and special school sufficiency.

The aligned resource provisions will support mainstream inclusion, by providing access to mainstream education for children with a similar profile of need to those in the special school. The wider working with the mainstream sector that is expected of this school will further bolster mainstream inclusion. There will be commissioning arrangements in place to monitor the impact of this and support success.

The reintegration pathway will provide a route for children to return to mainstream, which will be particularly useful if a child's needs change, and it becomes apparent that they do not need to be in a special school.

A key strategic aim is to prevent avoidable usage of independent settings. This school is being designed against the profile of independent provisions that are frequently used, to ensure it is a viable alternative. Initial discussions have taken place with health services to support this, with further discussions on-going.

The joint aspect of the bid fits a wider aspiration to work more effectively with neighbouring LAs. The 50/50 split in this bid reflects the genuine spirit of partnership that we are looking to adopt in the delivery of this school.

### **Sufficiency position and forecast**

Sheffield is forecasting a significant increase in demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) places over the next five years.

Sheffield recently commissioned 1st Planner to undertake net capacity assessments of the special school estate. These assessments show that Sheffield's special schools are at or near capacity, with limited scope for expansion due to site constraints. A new school is needed, given forecast demand (anticipated growth of 300 special places over five years).

Alongside this bid, we are looking to deliver further mainstream inclusion, via growth of resource provisions and improvements to funding arrangements.

We are working to grow our resource provisions, with an aspiration to double this over the next five years. Through our funding work, we are looking to ensure we meet need as effectively as possible and further enable mainstream inclusion.

In terms of need, the highest area of need in Sheffield is ASD. Sheffield has the highest rate of ASD in special schools and secondary schools for statistical neighbours and core cities. 41% all children with an EHC Plan have ASD, the highest proportion. Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs is next at 15%.

Sheffield's use of independent provision currently costs around £6.5m. There is a significant risk of this expenditure increasing due to rising demand and lack of special school capacity – this bid is aimed at helping to prevent that. Over 40% of independent placements have a primary need of ASD.

## **Benefits**

The new school will deliver many benefits. It will increase the capacity of Sheffield's special school provision, ensuring sufficiency and delivery of statutory duties. The school will reduce demand on high-cost independent placements, saving public money.

There will also be benefits for mainstream inclusion, the emphasis on working with resource provisions and outreach will be set out and reiterated from the start. This will ensure that the new school helps improve mainstream inclusion.

The joint bid will also deliver regional benefits and facilitate wider collaboration. This school will be a lynchpin for wider collaboration on SEND and help unlock other areas of joint working.

## **Barnsley**

### **Strategic Fit**

In Barnsley, we have high ambitions for all our children and young people, inclusive of those with SEND and those who are vulnerable. Our ambition is to support all to have a successful journey through childhood and into adulthood as happy and productive members of their community. We know that some children and young people, will need additional support, at times, throughout their journey.

Across the local area, there is a commitment to deliver high quality education for all children and young people, including those who have SEND.

Our SEND Improvement Plan and SEND Strategy clearly sets out the local area's commitment to delivering high support and provision across all our schools and educational settings, enabling the best outcomes for every child and young person over seven key priorities and four key enablers:

Priorities:

- Engagement, participation and coproduction: children and young people.
- Engagement, participation and coproduction: parent/carer.
- Early identification and SEN support.
- Meeting needs through specialist support and provision.
- Communication and interaction (autism and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)).
- Preparation for adulthood.
- Early years identification, support and provision (actions not yet agreed)

Enablers:

- Quality of data
- Local offer
- Financial balance
- Workforce development

Key objectives for Barnsley are to ensure children and young people with SEND have access to the right type of school placement which best meets their needs, that is within their community and is closer to home. This includes those who have been categorised as having needs relating to social, emotional and mental health; autism and/or speech, language and communication needs.

To ensure value for money and the most effective use of available resources continues to underpin our strategy.

To enable children and young people who require ongoing specialist support to be placed in the best possible provision and have their needs met through a stable and enriching school life.

Children and young people tell us that they want to be included in their local education school or setting as much as possible. Being part of their community is part of their education. Children and young people need to feel like they belong and want to learn in education settings that have staff who understand their needs and can help them to make progress, including academic, social and emotional progress. They want to be happy and learn alongside their peers. Young people want a variety of post 16 options that are explained at the earliest opportunity by education providers.

Whilst much of the capacity development is providing short and medium cost avoidance, the growing need for capacity of autism provision set against the rise in EHC Plans is a multi-faceted approach. Utilising early identification and support, graduated response as well as the development of in borough provision.

### **Sufficiency**

There is clear evidence of an increased need for additional Autism Communication & Interaction education provision for Barnsley children and a focus of the proposals is to develop additional provision for children and young people with these particular identified needs.

The latest forecast data demonstrates the most common primary need for pupils with an EHC Plan in Barnsley state funded schools as at January 2022 was Autism with 30.04% of pupils. The second highest need of Barnsley pupils with an EHC Plan was SLCN 21.5% followed by Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) 18.7% and then Mild Learning Disability (MLD) 8.9%.

With continuing growth forecast in these areas, this impacts on the availability of appropriate education settings in borough. There is a clear indication of additional spaces required across settings including special school with a projected increased use of Independent Non Maintained Special Schools (INMSS) settings if options are not considered in terms of capacity development and additional support identified and implemented locally.

There are currently only two special schools within the Barnsley area. Current capacity in maintained and Multi Academy Trust (MAT) Special School settings in Barnsley is provided by two MAT Special schools. Greenacre School, that has capacity for 342 pupils, and Springwell Learning Community which has capacity for 116 pupils with SEMH needs.

The current provision of our two local special schools, Greenacre School and Springwell Learning Community does not meet the continuum of provision required for children and young people with autism or offer much parental choice.

Barnsley does not yet have an autism specific special school to provide these pupils with an appropriate placement.

Continuing developments as part of the SEND Sufficiency strategy for Barnsley have included increased numbers of resource provision places, with this key area of work continuing in challenging circumstances with limited opportunities for Resource Provision expansions from secondary mainstream schools. The long-term use of INMSS settings is not a sustainable option.

Our annual review process for children and young people in INMSS identifies those who may be able to have their needs met in a setting closer to home and as we continue our work around this priority we will be able to offer more specialist places for Barnsley children, resulting in a decreased demand for out of borough settings.

## **Benefits**

It will benefit a group of children from many areas of Barnsley through enabling them to have their education needs met within a provision that meets their needs, improve parental choice, and prevent the alternative of placing these vulnerable young children in high-cost independent provision, reducing the impact on the high needs block deficit for Barnsley.

Embedding a partnership-based approach, to ensure the appropriate range and capacity of provision is available that supports Barnsley's inclusive culture in local mainstream schools, academies and specialist settings that enables the needs of a greater number of children and young people to be met. This builds upon our

commitment expressed within the Barnsley Alliance for Schools and the Education Improvement Strategy.

The overriding objective of the School Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs, and/or Disability is to meet these needs, closer to home, through investing in and improving both capacity and quality within local mainstream and special schools.

This will provide a much-needed increase in specialist provision for children with autism that historically has not been available through local provision in Barnsley, which in turn has required the significant reliance on independent settings to provide education provision for this cohort of children.

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

### **Existing Provision**

In Barnsley, we have the following special schools:

- Greenacre.
- Springwell.
- West Riding.

In Sheffield, we have the following special schools:

#### Primary

- Archdale.
- Mossbrook.
- Rowan.
- Woolley Wood.

#### Secondary (Y7-Y11)

- Heritage Park.
- Holgate Meadows.

#### Secondary (with post 16 provision)

- Bents Green
- Kenwood.
- Seven Hills.
- Talbot.

#### Key Stage 2-4

- Discovery
- New Special Free School due September 2024.

In addition to the above, both LAs have a significant number of resource provisions – 10 in Barnsley, 26 in Sheffield.

Sheffield also has a hospital school - Becton.

## **Pupil Growth**

It is anticipated that the school will open with 136 places across key stages 2-3.

The school will then increase by 32 places per year as learners move into key stage 4, achieving 200 places in year 3.

Aligned resource provisions will operate with separate places from the above.

## **Placement Process**

Places will be filled via the statutory placement process; we anticipate the development of a joint protocol between the two LA placement services to manage the consultation process with the school.

This will be aimed at ensuring the process is as streamlined as possible, and joint across the two LAs.