



Department
for Education

Wiltshire Special Free School

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

Wiltshire Council

April 2023

OVERVIEW

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

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 Wiltshire 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

Wiltshire SEND Inclusion Strategy 2020-2023 includes the Priority Area 4, 'Improving the Range and Quality of Provision' ambition to 'ensure that all the services and support for CYP with SEND are brilliant and are there at the right time and in a way that meets their needs'. The Strategy includes the objective to 'build and staff new schools across the county' and includes the desire to create a new SEND Free School for learners of SEMH designation.

Success in 'Improving the Range and Quality of Provision' is measured in two areas:

- a) Sufficiency or range of provision (the right number of places, in the right locations)
- b) Quality. We want parents reporting that their child's needs are met because they can access services. We want new SEND provisions being developed with positive feedback from families, as success is measured through meeting the needs and aspirations of children with SEND. The SEND Inclusion Strategy includes a pictorial representation of children and young people's aspirations for their school – which will be at the forefront of building and service design.

The current shortage of special school places means the local authority must meet EHCP needs in Independent Special Schools (ISS) in and out of county. In October 2022, some 331 learners were placed in ISS. Other children are held in nurseries, children centres and mainstream schools, whilst waiting for more specialist provision that better meets their needs.

A key aim of the new school is to address the needs of Wiltshire learners with SEND, in Wiltshire - and thereby divert children from lengthy and expensive journeys to alternative ISS provision.

The Director of Wiltshire Parent and Carer Council offers this statement of support:

The WPCCC is fully supportive of Wiltshire Council's Free School. At present, SEMH provision is limited, and this presents a significant challenge to children and young people with SEND, which in turns adds additional pressure on parent carers. The limited provision we do have in Wiltshire has demonstrated significant benefits through their application of therapeutic and trauma-informed practice This is helping to give children and young people the confidence and skills they need to

integrate into their communities, improve their quality of family life, de-escalate family crisis, and set a path to establishing positive life chances.

.....Having increased SEMH capacity and provision would also help Wiltshire's System of Excellence aspiration, through in-reach and outreach work, to support community and mainstream settings to be more confident and skilled in their inclusion of children and young people with SEND.

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

To meet sufficiency targets, Wiltshire Council works with its Special School partners to grow provision at Silverwood, SAIL, Springfields, Exeter House and Downland. In addition, the LA has sought to build capacity in primary and secondary resource bases; and develop inclusive practice to support learners with SEND in mainstream settings. The new SEMH Free School will add to this portfolio and provide geographic coverage for west/central Wiltshire.

The SEND & Inclusion Self Evaluation identifies a shortfall in special school and resource base capacity; with gaps in provision (notably, but not exclusively, in SEMH primary provision across the county and SEMH secondary provision in north and west Wiltshire). Alongside the new Free School, Wiltshire Council are expanding Silverwood Special School and will benefit from the DfE investment in Salisbury Academy for Inspirational Learning (SAIL). Commissioning plans for the other Wiltshire special schools satisfy other primary need designations, in other locations.

Despite capital investments in Wiltshire's special school estate, High Needs Place Planning identifies a significant deficit of special school places now and in the future. At October 2022, there are 62 children awaiting a special school place - with a further 331 children having their needs met in ISS. Wiltshire is experiencing population growth, as well as net transfers into Wiltshire. Place planning forecasts demand for Special School places growing by 68-76 places per year for the next 5 years (or 7.2%-7.8% annual growth).

The known and increasing shortfall in SEMH places, means that the new school will sit alongside other actions in the Wiltshire SEND Inclusion Strategy (2020-2023) to develop inclusive education.

Wiltshire Council continue to develop inclusive alternatives to special schools, as we believe many learners thrive in mainstream provisions with the right support. The Local Authority has invited offers from academies to provide 4 secondary resource bases across the County from September 2023. In addition, the Systems of Excellence work focuses on providing the right assessments and the right support, at the right time, to ensure all learners with SEND can benefit from a 'brilliant education' and appropriate support, wherever they are educated by Wiltshire Council. It is hoped that plans for 4 Secondary Resource Bases will divert a proportion of the 89% of the Year 7s who currently transition from Primary Resource Bases to Special Schools into a comparable secondary Resource Base. However, this cohort of students are not those intended for the SEMH Special School.

Due to the rising demand for special school places in Wiltshire - combined with the shortfall in SEMH designated provision - circa 96% of places at the proposed school will be commissioned by Wiltshire Council for local families. Mutual recouplement currently stands at 15%, so there is confidence the school will be fully commissioned. Informal discussions with Bath and NE Somerset SEND lead highlighted interest and demand for places, due to the proposed location near the BANES border. The new school will also appeal to other neighbouring local authorities, as there's a deficit in SEMH places in the region.

Wiltshire Council has a robust SEND Decisions Panel process to ensure children and young people have their needs properly and completely assessed – and are then referred to schools which offer the best fit for their needs. There is confidence that Decisions Panels will result in the most appropriate referrals and commissions for the new Free School.