

## **Detailed proposal document for the proposed development of an SEMH Unit for 12 children at Kennet Valley School**

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### **School and LA details**

Kennet Valley School (the School) is a maintained primary school in West Berkshire Council's (the LA) area, rated "Good" by OFSTED in 2019.

### **Description of alteration and evidence of demand**

We are seeking to develop a new SEMH unit for 12 children at the School. This provision will be based on the School site and will meet the needs of primary aged learners (aged 4 to 11 years) with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, who may also have a diagnosis of autism. In line with Department for Education statutory guidance, this represents a significant change to the School and the LA has a duty to consult to understand stakeholder's views regarding this proposal. The proposal will require an amendment to the School's public record on the Get Information about Schools (GIAS) system to include:

- "SEMH" as a "Type of SEN provision" the School provides.
- "Unit" as a "Type of resourced provision" sited at the School, with a capacity of 12.
- "222" as the school's full capacity, including the Unit.

Opening provision to meet the needs of Primary age children was identified as a priority in West Berkshire's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy, which was published in 2018. This strategy was co-produced with local stakeholders and families. In West Berkshire, the number of children who require an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or are identified as requiring SEND Support with a primary identified need of SEMH or Autism has been increasing. Between 2017-18 and March 2020, the number of EHCPs in which SEMH or Autism was identified as the primary need rose from 135 (15.5%) to 205 (19.9%). Although many young people with SEMH and Autism have their needs met within mainstream provision, a significant and increasing proportion of young people with more acute needs require extra specialist provision and have been placed in independent/non-maintained specialist schools, including some which are out of area. Between 2010/11 and 2020/21, the number of children with EHCP's placed at independent or non-maintained special schools increased by 28% from 52 to 73. The cost of these placements is currently estimated at a minimum cost of £80,000 per annum not including transport.

### **Objectives, e.g. how the change would increase standards of education or increase parental choice**

The School is well placed to host this unit. The School leadership team are advocates of a therapeutic approach to teaching and learning; this will form a necessary foundation to practice at the new setting. In addition, the school have been recognised in recent Ofsted inspections for the quality of their teaching for SEND pupils. The School are based on a large site which can comfortably accommodate this unit and still facilitate a degree of separation to the main school. All children enrolled at the School will still have access to a substantial, larger than average playing field.

In common with many mainstream schools, a significant number of children at Kennet Valley School will have a diagnosis or traits of autism. This is similar to the cohort of children who will attend the specialist unit, many of whom will also have a diagnosis of autism and will exhibit similar behaviours. Staff at the School already have significant experience of teaching children with Autism and will be able to use this knowledge as a foundation for developing this new, specialist provision. A partnership with The Castle @ Theale will support the School to develop its new resource, including recruitment and curriculum. Staff at the School may work at both the unit and the main School. Professional development and School facilities and equipment will be shared as appropriate and the overall management of staff and resources will be flexibly adapted to meet the needs of all children on roll. Subject to an assessment of their needs via Annual Review and consultation with parents, children and young people from the main School site may be placed at the unit to better suit their needs. Governance, budget and policies will be shared across the unit and the School.

Opening a provision of this kind will positively impact outcomes for this cohort of children. It will offer parents the opportunity to send their children to high-quality local provision, instead of out of area. We anticipate that this will have the following additional benefits to families and the local authority:-

- A greater number of children will be educated within their local area and will not lose community links by being placed a significant distance away from their homes.
- Multi-agency working and communication will be easier / better for these children and their families if they remain in a local placement and are able to access local services
- The quality of education will be more closely monitored for this particularly vulnerable cohort of children and the resource will be able to access Local Authority support from West Berkshire, which is known to be of consistent high quality. This includes a strong focus on Therapeutic Thinking approaches.
- Placement cost, including transport, will be less than the cost of independent/non-maintained placements.

### **Effect on other institutions**

Currently, learners from this cohort who are placed out of area in independent or non-maintained provision incur a significant cost to West Berkshire Council's high needs block. This funding is provided by the government to the local authority for the needs of children with SEND. These out of area placements are placing unsustainable pressure on the high needs block. The lack of local SEMH provision has placed a strain on other resources which are already at capacity. This includes local special schools and mainstream ASD resources.

It is not anticipated that this development will have a detrimental effect on any other local institutions as there is a significant shortage of provision in the area for children with complex SEMH needs who may also have a diagnosis of autism.

## **Project costs, how these will be met, and long-term value for money**

The cost of any building works for this unit will be met via an allocated budget from the council's Capital Programme. This will include initial set up costs, such as furniture. Funding bandings will be agreed between West Berkshire Council and Kennet Valley School to meet the ongoing costs of the provision. Detailed work is being undertaken to establish the precise revenue costs for this provision, but these will be significantly less than the costs of equivalent non-maintained or independent provision; offering the local authority significant savings over the longer term.

## **Implementation plan**

Pending the outcome of this consultation, detailed design work will commence on the project in line with project planning being led by property services at West Berkshire council. Building work will later be tendered ahead of work commencing on the site itself. Parallel to this, separate planning for recruitment, curriculum, finance and admissions will be undertaken with wider stakeholders. The cohort of children attending this provision will be staggered over a period of years, reaching its full capacity at a later stage.

When more detailed design work has been undertaken, West Berkshire Council will share public updates about this project, including details of the facilities and planned opening.

## **Procedure for making responses**

Anyone wishing to respond to this proposal can do so by visiting the Consultation and Engagement Hub at [www.westberks.gov.uk/SEMHKennetValley](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/SEMHKennetValley) from Tuesday, 20 September to Monday, 31 October 2022.

Alternatively, respondents can request a copy of the consultation in a physical or alternative format by contacting the SEN and Disabled Children's Service directly at West Berkshire Council, Market Street Offices, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 5LD. Queries can also be directed to 01635 519713 or [SENConsultations@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:SENConsultations@westberks.gov.uk).

