

Wednesday, 6 July 2022

## SCHOOL PLACE SUFFICIENCY

Purpose of report:

To review the strategic approach to ensuring sufficiency and sustainability of school places. To also consider the challenges of both within the context of the White Paper [Opportunity for all - Strong schools with great teachers for your child \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/104222/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child.pdf).

### Introduction:

1. Surrey has a falling birth rate and a surplus of primary school places unevenly spread across the county. The secondary sector is still seeing some growth.
2. 24% (71) of our 297 primary schools are in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) or in a standalone academy (SAT). 79% (42) of our 53 secondary schools are in a MAT or SAT. 37% (3) of our 8 PRUs are already in a MAT and 52% (13) of our 25 specialist schools are academies.
3. The government has also set out their ambition for all schools to join a strong and effective Multi Academy Trust. This was set out by the Secretary of State in a speech in 2020 and subsequently in [Opportunity for all - Strong schools with great teachers for your child \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/104222/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child.pdf) which was published in March 2022.
4. Surrey has a range of diverse schools - urban and rural, academy and maintained, faith and non-faith. There are 28 infant or junior schools which have fewer than 90 pupils, 45 primary schools with fewer than 210 pupils and four secondary schools with fewer than 600 pupils.

### Sufficiency

5. The School Organisation Plan (Appendix 1) shows the overall sufficiency of places by planning area for both mainstream and special school provision.

6. There is currently a surplus of primary places across Surrey in most areas due mainly to the decline in the birth rate. At the peak in 2012, Surrey had 14,237 births, with Reigate and Banstead seeing the most births and Mole Valley seeing the least. However, births in Surrey then fell by nearly 700 overall in 2013, mirroring the national trend. The number of births then plateaued, and has fallen year on year since 2016, reaching a low of 11,880 in 2020.
7. However, demand is not uniform across the county and so some areas are facing greater surpluses than others. Any pockets of exceptional demand in the primary sector will stem from new housing or unexpected migration rather than expected demographic trends. However, it is too early to quantify what impact, if any, the pandemic will have on the birth rate across the county and this will be monitored closely.
8. As the larger primary cohorts work their way through into secondary, we are seeing the need for some growth in the secondary sector. In September 2021, Ash Manor, Broadwater, St Pauls Catholic and Oakwood schools all increased their Year 7 Published Admissions Number (PAN). There is a new Department for Education Free School (Walton Heathside) opening in September 2022 and we have made the temporary increase at Woolmer Hill from 150 to 180, permanent. There are also expansions at St. Andrew's and Bishop Wand, which will both increase their Year 7 PANs in September 2022.
9. In addition, some areas of the county are facing challenges in the secondary sector due to additional pupils arriving in communities from new housing developments or unexpected migration. The council is working with school leaders, academy trusts and other stakeholders to find the best way to ensure that secondary places are provided for all Surrey residents who require them. However, again, demand is not uniform, so there are also some areas of the county where there are vacancies in secondary schools which must also be monitored.
10. We have already increased our specialist school places for September 2021 by 290 and another 283 places are in line to be delivered for September 2022.
11. We have a number of additional children and young people being placed as a result of conflict in Afghanistan and Ukraine. We are keeping a close eye on the impact of placing these pupils on planning areas.

### Ukraine

359 applications received from 29 March to end of 18 May, of which: 240 primary age, 119 secondary age. 23 of these are in Year 6 and they will need a secondary place for September. We are aware of five children so far who will need a Reception place for September.

## Afghanistan

285 applications received Afghan children evacuated from Afghanistan from September 2021 to date, of which: 197 primary age, 88 secondary age. Of the 285, 201 have been placed in Surrey schools (140 primary age, 61 secondary age). 84 have been placed in West Sussex schools (57 primary age, 27 secondary age).

## **Capital Spend**

### **Mainstream Capital Spend**

12. In the capital programme basic need provision there is spend on primary schools at around £7.2 million, providing places for September 2022 and 2023. While overall demand for primary school places is declining across Surrey due to a falling birth rate, there are localised pockets of high demand in certain areas due to inward migration and housing. For secondary schools, there is spend of approximately £23.9 million, providing places for September 2023.

### **Pupil Referral Units (PRU)/Alternative Provision (AP) Capital Programme**

13. Between 2020 and 2021, Surrey County Council's Cabinet approved the strategy to consolidate the current maintained PRU/AP Education Estate from nine small sites to five fit-for-purpose larger sites to comply with DfE Alternative Provision guidelines.
14. This was to ensure sufficiency of maintained Alternative Provision per quadrant by providing 240 places in total. From the £23.5m approved in the May 2020 Cabinet paper, £0.8m was allocated to the relocation of Pewley Hill accommodation to Wey Valley College, leaving a notional budget of £22.7m. The Pewley Hill relocation was delivered in September 2020 to time and budget.
15. The planning assumptions in the 2020 Cabinet paper regarding the suitability and use of Reigate Valley College, North East, and North West Short Stay School sites required adjustments to provide accommodation to the relevant standards. All five projects have been developed sufficiently (i.e., to RIBA Stage 1) where current project budgets based on actual proposals can be reported.
16. Two out of the five projects are on track for delivery at a cost of approximately £10m. Fordway is due to be delivered by September 2023 and Wey Valley College by September 2024. These will re-provide 68 of the total 240 places.

17. Land search coordinated by the council's Disposals & Acquisitions and Estates services is still underway to identify appropriate new build sites for three projects at Reigate Valley College, North East Short Stay School, and North West Short Stay School (172 places) deliverable by September 2024.
18. A summary of schemes is attached at Appendix 4 along with the current OFSTED Report links.
19. Surrey County Council Commissioning and Education teams, working in conjunction with our Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), devised a new Service Level Agreement (SLA) which was launched and implemented throughout 2021. This new SLA agreement has children and young people at the heart of it and focusses attention on the needs and outcomes of all learners, especially our most vulnerable. It requires outcomes for all learners to be collected as part of the annual review process and will be reported on later in the Autumn Term 2022.

### **Additional Needs<sup>1</sup> (SEND) Capital Programme**

20. Between 2019 and 2022, Surrey County Council's Cabinet approved the strategy for four phases of the Additional Needs (SEND) Capital Programme with a combined capital investment of £139.6m to expand the local specialist estate at pace between 2019-2026. This is to ensure sufficiency for up to 6,000 places so that local children and young people with additional needs, sometimes referred to as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities ('SEND'), who require a specialist school placement can have their educational needs met close to home, better connected to local communities and within state-maintained provision wherever possible. By 2030/31, Surrey's Specialist Education Estate will have approximately 5,540 places.
21. The provision of new additional needs (SEND) places in Surrey provision is estimated to save c£30k on average per place based on the difference in cost with the NMI (Non-Maintained Independent) sector. This cost differential is based on NMI providers both in and out of county.
22. Based on current estimates the cost containment associated with the new provision being made available is as follows.

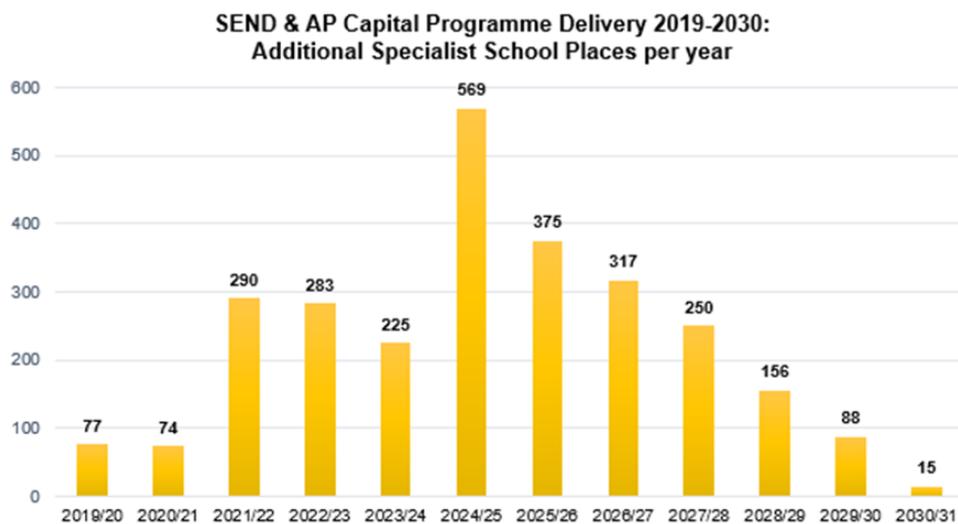
<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>
<b>£'m</b>	<b>£'m</b>	<b>£'m</b>	<b>£'m</b>	<b>£'m</b>
8.3	6.6	8.3	10.5	9.7

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<sup>1</sup> Children and young people have told us they prefer to be referred to as young people with additional needs, rather than as SEND young people, and their schools to be referred to as 'specialist schools' rather than 'special schools'. Where possible, throughout this document, we have tried to reflect this preference.

23. The Additional Needs (SEND) Capital Programme comprises of 76 projects in total: 22 projects have been delivered to date, 11 are on track for September 2022, which leaves 42 to be delivered between 2023-2026.
24. As of September 2021, approximately 500 additional specialist places have already been delivered at a cost of £10.74m and the programme is on track to deliver more than 280 new places for September 2022 at a cost of £8.3m.
25. Table 1 details the projected number of additional and re-provided school places that are deliverable per year under Surrey's Additional Needs (SEND) and AP (Alternative Provision) Capital Programmes.
26. However, it should be noted that this is subject to some variation as Additional Needs (SEND) Phase 4 projects (approved in principle in January 2022 and deliverable between 2023-2026) are developed. An additional capital bid to the DfE has been submitted to secure an additional £56m to deliver Phase 4 of the programme in full. We expect to hear the outcome of this by Summer 2022.

Table 1:



## Sustainability

27. Changes to the way settings and schools are funded, a falling birth rate, recruitment and retention issues, a changing role for the local authority and a new Ofsted framework are combining to create very real challenges for all schools but especially our smaller settings and schools. Proactive, collaborative solutions will provide resilience against many of these challenges and reduce the risk of poor inspection outcomes and potential sponsored academy orders. Some small schools have started consultation on federation as one way of mitigating risk.

28. Surrey County Council encourages self-determination and respects the autonomy of individual schools and trusts whilst at the same time seeking to work with them to address the challenges. We encourage genuine, open and transparent collaboration with other schools in a planning area as whilst a decision could be of vital importance to one school, it could also impact and be important to neighbouring schools.
29. We want to:
- Increase the number of schools in Surrey that are rated as either Good or Outstanding under the 2019 inspection framework;
  - Promote schools working together to develop curriculum and pedagogy;
  - Ensure that we have sufficient local places for children and young people;
  - Promote inclusion and improve outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners;
  - Ensure value for money and sustainable use of the limited available resources;
  - Ensure that every school has a sustainable budget and a sustainable offer that meets the local need.
30. Small schools face key challenges of recruitment and retention of leadership and governance, resilience (as often the Headteacher holds multiple roles including Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), capacity for school improvement and a sustainable budget. There are 73 infant or junior schools with fewer than 90 pupils or primary schools with fewer than 210 pupils. These schools are listed in Appendix 2.
31. The DfE has for many years been particularly concerned about schools serving rural communities. Certain primary schools in England are designated as rural primary schools for the purposes of Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires that when either a local authority or governing body of certain schools formulates proposals for the discontinuance of a rural primary school it has regard to specific factors. These factors include the likely effect of discontinuance on the local community and any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.
32. Before publishing proposals for discontinuance, the local authority or governing body must consult certain persons, including parents and, where the local

authority is a county council, any district and parish councils. The Department for Education uses the Office for National Statistics' rural and urban area classification to identify rural schools as being located in towns and fringe areas, villages or hamlets and isolated dwellings. A list of our designated rural schools is found in Appendix 3.

## **White Paper and Schools Bill**

33. The White Paper [Opportunity for all - Strong schools with great teachers for your child \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/106522/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child.pdf) and associated Schools Bill 2022 is the first major education reform in six years. The Schools Bill proposes powers for the local authority and strengthens duties in a number of ways, for example:

- The role for the local authority is defined as 'Champion for all children.' The powers are extended through admissions arrangements and a duty for all Schools and Trusts to work collaboratively with the local authority which enhances the ability for us to work together in the best interests of all children.
- The ability for local authorities to apply to the Secretary of State via the Regional Schools Commissioner for a schools or schools to join a Multi Academy Trust.
- The requirement for the local authority to hold a register for all children not in education or being educated at home.
- The ability for local authorities to set up Multi Academy Trusts under certain conditions and circumstances.

34. The Schools Bill needs to make its way through Parliament into law. However, as a local area partnership the local authority is working together with schools including Multi Academy Trusts to develop implementation plans that are right for Surrey.

35. The Schools Bill and academisation will not on its own create strong and sustainable schools. This is reliant on our continued work in partnership with schools (individually and in groups) to make the best arrangements possible for the children and young people in Surrey. Our vision is to ensure they are able to go to school in line with our ambition; that they can have brighter futures, lead healthy Lives, be safe and resilient and be rooted in Surrey.

<b>Conclusions including summary risks and mitigations:</b>
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### **Risks**

36. The focus on all schools joining a strong Multi Academy Trust by 2030 (or have a clear plan to join one) may bring tension into the system for some of our very small schools which have budget challenges and low roll numbers, as during the due diligence stage these vulnerabilities will come to light.
37. We have a surplus of primary school places that is adding to the vulnerability of some smaller schools. Demographics seem unlikely to change in the short and medium term. It is essential to work proactively with the school community and partners (for example our Diocesan Directors of Education) to ensure that Surrey continues to maintain a strong and sustainable school system that helps children achieve their potential.
38. There has been a historic shortage of specialist school places.
39. There are potential delays to schemes related to reprovision of Alternative Provision and data has not consistently been collected on outcomes.
40. The changes to the National Funding Formula and the new Inspection Framework creates additional challenges for schools.

### **Mitigations**

41. We are working collaboratively through our Local Education Partnership to improve outcomes for children and navigate the challenges to our education system.
42. Our school organisation planning is well developed and we have a clear strategy linked to the sustainability of schools. We are working in partnership to deliver these changes and those associated with the implementation of the White Paper and Schools Bill.
43. We have a well-developed plan for increasing our specialist school provision and have already increased the number of places available, ensuring that children and young people with additional needs are educated close to their home.
44. We are working closely with our land and property colleagues to develop solutions to deliver the changes needed for our alternative provision estate.

<b>Recommendations:</b>
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45. The Select Committee:
  - a) Notes the changing education landscape including issues arising from a changing demographic and a new Schools Bill.

- b) Supports the proactive approach taken to identify schools that may need a supported conversation to identify and pursue options that are right for the children in their community and in the wider area.
- c) Supports the programme of investment agreed in order to achieve a sufficiency of places for children in Surrey.
- d) Notes the importance of continued partnership working and the essential collaboration with providers and partners required to deliver improved outcomes for children.

<b>Next steps:</b>
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A further update to be provided to the Select Committee in July 2023 to provide an update on developments and a report on progress.

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**Report Contact**

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**Sources/background papers**

School Organisation Plan

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