



Department
for Education

Kent Special Free School

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

Kent County Council

July 2023

OVERVIEW

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

Applicant groups can access the key school specification information, along with the full 'How to Apply' guidance. 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 Kent 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

Kent's ambitions for children and young people with Special Education Needs (SEN) is articulated through its SEND strategy 2021-2024 which has been jointly developed by KCC and the NHS in conjunction with children, young people, parents and carers, Kent PACT (Kent Parents and Carers Together) and other key stakeholders.
https://www.kent.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0012/13323/Strategy-for-children-with-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities.pdf

Greater detail on how these ambitions are supported is included in a number of supporting documents, principally The County-Wide Approach to Inclusive Education (CATIE):

<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/inclusion/countwide-approach-to-inclusive-education>

Special Schools play an important role in the continuum of education provision in Kent. However, we also need to focus in developing the role of mainstream schools in the SEND education continuum and the role of Specialist Resource Provisions in enabling mainstream schools to successfully support more complex children and young people with SEND.

Nationally there has been a large increase in demand for EHCPs and greater numbers of children and young people being supported in Local Authority maintained special and independent special schools. In Kent this trend has grown even faster, and we are now an outlier, nationally:

- Our rate of growth in EHCPs is well above national averages per 10,000 children.
- Kent has proportionately less children identified as requiring SEN support in mainstream schools when compared to the national average.
- There are proportionately less children with EHCPs educated in our mainstream schools in Kent compared to national and statistical neighbour averages.
- Kent has proportionately far more children placed in either maintained special or independent special schools or Specialist Resource Provisions than national and statistical neighbour averages.

Despite the current situation and considering targets to bring Kent's position in line with national and statistical neighbour averages by implementing the actions outlined in Kent's Safety Valve case, analysis demonstrates that additional special school provision is required to meet future demand from a growing population in some parts of Kent. This demand is linked to population growth from housing developments, providing capacity where we can see children and young people are having to travel considerable distances outside their local area and is also linked to the readjustment of special school placements from the independent special school sector (high cost) to the maintained special school sector (improved value for money). Kent is currently placing children in independent schools at twice the national average.

Kent has a total of 21 Local Authority maintained special schools, 1 special academy and 2 Free Schools. We also have a special school agreed for the Isle of Sheppey to be run by SABDEN which will open for September 2024.

For the academic year 2022/23 Kent has commissioned 5,495 places in Kent special schools, an increase of 259 places. Of the 5,495 places, 680 are post-16. The current total designated number across Kent special schools as of September 2022 was 5,480. If total capacity of more recently established schools that are not yet full and total additional capacity of satellites opening from September is considered, Kent currently has capacity to offer up to 6,087 places across its special schools. Some of this capacity has to come online gradually as new schools fill, allowing year groups to move through. However, recent place pressures in particular age groups have led to “bulges” and placing greater numbers of children (over the commissioned number) which is likely to cause capacity problems in certain schools as those children move through the school key stages or curriculum pathways.

Several special schools have satellites which are classes hosted in mainstream schools and are run by staff from the special school. These offer an opportunity for pupils to learn alongside mainstream peers, with support from specialist teaching staff as appropriate. Pupils remain on the roll of the special school and are included in the designated number of the special school. A number of these satellites have also been established to deal with pressure on places and lack of capacity to expand on the special school site with a number of new satellites that were originally planned for a 2023 or 2024 opening being brought forward to September 2022 to deal with pressure on places. As of January 2022, 1,681 Kent, resident pupils had places funded in an independent non maintained school, an increase of 285 places (20.4%) from January 2021 and representing 9.5% of all EHCPs; 650 of these independent placements were for a primary diagnosis of ASD and 556 for SEMH.

We have recently undertaken capacity assessments of all our special schools, (except our new schools), to identify future capacity requirements and also to inform potential for future expansion. This information will form part of the review of our continuum of provision and inform future capital investment. The capacity assessments (which are based on the current profile of ambulant/non ambulant pupils) currently indicate that we have 14 of our schools over capacity with some considerably over, 7 slightly under capacity (although some would require building adjustment to facilitate additional pupils) and three more recently established schools that are filling over time. Across all schools visited, 7 have site capacity to take some limited expansion. This will have to be tested through more detailed feasibility work once the assessments have been validated with schools.

A number of workstreams in inn place to address areas of weakness and/or high expenditure within the SEND system in Kent. This include addressing the number and location of special school places in order to aid the adjustment of pupils from the non-maintained special school sector into the maintained special school sector, completing work on the Specialist Resource Provisions that have been consulted on and agreed, transitioning and expanding one of our primary SRPs for ASD to become a Cullum Centre as part of plans with the National Autistic Society and Cullum Foundation to grow local expertise in supporting mainstream schools with

children with more complex ASD and looking to invest capital in mainstream nurture spaces to support plans to increase the percentage of children and young people with EHCPs educated in Kent's mainstream schools.

The forecast data modelled on SEND Safety Valve targets, indicate a need for new maintained special schools, in addition to addressing capacity issues in our current maintained special schools and potential future expansions subject to feasibilities.

Due to the current and future demand, along with the need to transition young people who currently attend an Independent Non-maintained settings to a state funded special school, it is the intention that Kent County Council will look to commission all 250 places at this new special school. On occasion residual places may be available to be commissioned by OLA's in the area, but the new school is required specifically to meet the growing demand for state funded special school places for Kent resident children.

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

To support the evidence-base for the need for a special school in Swanley, North Kent, particularly for a SLD/PD/PMLD and ASD school, the two SLD/PD/PMLD and ASD schools serving the area are over significantly over capacity. Those schools are Milestone Academy in New Ash Green and Ifield School in Gravesend.

Dartford is also an area of high housing and population growth, with the [Ebbsfleet Garden City](#) forecast to provide 12,000 more new homes, in addition to the 3000 already built and occupied. Redevelopment in other parts of Dartford, under the auspices of Dartford Borough Council, will add more housing. A new Local Plan is in the [early stages of consultation](#), and it indicates a target of 790 new dwellings, per annum, for the year duration of the plan period. This is a continuation of the existing [Local Plan](#), which indicated a housing target of 17,900 new homes.

Gravesham Borough Council is currently conducting a consultation on a review of its local plan. This review will likely confirm the existing plan to continue new housebuilding, but no firm figures are available yet.

Sevenoaks is also looking to publish a new local plan, and early indication is that the numbers of new dwellings could be as high as 14,900.

The new housing across the Sevenoaks, Dartford and Gravesham area will create a need for more Special School places. The existing pressures on Special School places in the area indicates very clearly that any new demand, cannot be absorbed into existing capacity.

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A new SLD/PD/PMLD and ASD Special School in Sevenoaks (250 places) would address a geographical gap and reduce pressure on SLD/PD/PMLD and ASD schools that are over capacity, relieving pressure on Dartford, Gravesham and Sevenoaks schools, and special schools further afield in Tonbridge, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone. These schools can then serve their local communities and reduce displacement of children who currently must travel further. Currently 186 children from North Kent (Sevenoaks, Dartford and Gravesham) travel outside the area to special schools elsewhere in Kent. Specifically:

School	Students
Grange Park School	76
Nexus School	49
Oakley School	22
Snowfields Academy	11
Five Acre Wood School	10
Bower Grove School	8
Stone Bay School	4
Meadowfield School	2
Aspire School	2
Goldwyn School	2
Total	186