

Responses to pre-statutory consultation

Will Ashley be regarded as a "new" school? If so will it have to be established as an Academy?

It will not be a new school. It will remain a community special school.

Is it big enough? Would it provide summer clubs?

If this proposal is approved, Halton will no longer have a gap in its provision for children and young people with social communication and autism needs. Currently the range of provision includes, mainstream with support, specialist resourced bases in mainstream schools and special school provision. This will be sufficient to meet demand for the foreseeable future.

Have you got the trained staff?

The Staff are in the process of undertaking extensive training and professional development to ensure they have the expertise and skills required to meet the needs of the changing cohort at Ashley School.

Would it provide summer clubs?

Holiday support could be considered as part of the extended school offer.

Will MLD (Mild Learning Difficulties) children still be accepted at Ashley?

The current cohort of MLD pupils will continue to be supported at Ashley School. If the re-designation is agreed, Ashley School will look to accept pupils with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) with specific language, social and communication needs.

Support for MLD pupils will however be available in mainstream schools.

Will the authority guarantee finance, resources, staff support?

The school will be funded through the High Needs funding formula.

Training and support will be provided for staff.

The learning environment of the school will be adapted as appropriate to meet the needs of the pupils. Capital funding has already been set aside to fund this work if the re-designation/extension is agreed.

The local authority will continue to support the school so that it gains National Autistic Society (NAS) accreditation.

Will this be an addition to the options already available to young people?

The Ashley re-designation is vital to ensuring a continuum of provision in Halton for pupils with specific language, social and communication needs and autism.

This is, therefore, an addition to existing provision.

A central claim is that the creation of 51 places for ages 16-19 at Ashley School will bring back into the borough students who currently attend institutions elsewhere.

The proposal is to address a gap in provision for vulnerable children and young people (ages 11-19) with a diagnosis of autism and identified social communication needs within Halton Borough Special School Provision.

Following the first phase of the consultation it has been proposed that the number of places for students aged 16-19 be reduced from 51 to 42 so that it is more closely aligned to the places offered from 11-16.

Since it is proposed that a re-designated Ashley School would offer 51 places for ages 16 -19 we are deeply concerned that the additional students will be those currently studying at Riverside College.

Under the existing arrangements 45% of Ashley pupils transfer to Riverside College.

At transition from Key Stage 2 parents look for 11-19 provision as they believe this provides stability and continuity for their children. Many of the parents of vulnerable children with a diagnosis of ASD and identified social communication needs have indicated that they would want 11- 19 special school provision.

More recently there has been an increase in vulnerable children with a diagnosis of ASD and identified social communication needs accessing Ashley. This is evidenced by the change in pupil needs of those transferring to Ashley. It is anticipated that over the next few years Ashley will be entirely populated with these young people. It is therefore anticipated that the young people that would have previously attended Ashley and transferred to the College will be educated within the mainstream provision in Halton are likely to move through to the college from another route.

Over the past four years the College has worked very closely with Halton Borough Council to build up post- 16 provision for students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LLDD)

It is acknowledged that the college has worked closely with HBC to develop good effective post 16 provision for students with LLDD. It is anticipated that the offer from Ashley will complement this provision as it is aimed at supporting a different

cohort of young people, those with a diagnosis of Autism and identified Social Communication needs that are vulnerable and require ASC specific provision 16-19 delivered in a small school setting.

Data received by the college from officers of Halton Borough Council does not support the claim that the re-designation of Ashley will reduce the number of young people aged 16-19 with Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) placed in out of borough provision.

A number of factors have led the local authority to consider this proposal. These are as follows:

- i) The number of children on the ASD Pathway or on the waiting list to get a diagnosis;
- (ii) The gap in provision as expressed by parents;
- (iii) the increase in the number parents taking the local authority to tribunal on the grounds that there is a gap in provision;
- (iv) The independent review undertaken by the NAS which highlighted the gap in provision;
- (v) the number of young people aged 11-19 in out of borough provision.

If the gap in provision is not addressed, parents will seek out of borough provision.

Over the past four years the College has worked in partnership with Halton Borough Council to build up post -16 provision for students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LLDD). Independent external assessment of Riverside College's provision for people with LLDD indicates it is grade 1 outstanding.

The proposal to re-designate Ashley School puts at risk all that has been achieved in recent years and may make college provision for students with LLDD unviable.

We acknowledge that provision at Riverside College is excellent for the majority of students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LLDD). However, parents have expressed a view that there is a gap in provision for vulnerable young people with a diagnosis of autism and identified social communication needs.

It is hoped that Riverside College and Ashley School can work together to provide the best possible offer for our young people.

45% of Ashley pupils transfer to the College and it is important to note the change in the pupils now being admitted to Ashley. More vulnerable pupils with a diagnosis of

ASC and identified social communication needs are being admitted to Ashley School.

Following phase 1 informal consultations and further analysis of the data regarding demand for ASC specialism post 16 the capacity has been reduced from 51 to 42.

Parents are making representations for more specialist provision in advance of Year 11 and this is their right under the statutory processes.

The proposal to re-designate Ashley School is based, to a significant extent, on the recommendations put forward by the National Autistic Society (NAS).

Given the failure of the NAS researchers to assess provision at the College, it is not reasonable to place reliance on their recommendations in so far as they relate to post- 16 education in the borough.

The gap in provision had already been identified through feedback from parents and the number of parental appeals and cases taken to SENDIST were increasing. The NAS review tested this out with schools/parents and pupils and confirmed the overwhelming view is that there is a gap in provision in Halton from 11-19.

The College would have appreciated consultation on this proposal at a much earlier stage. Many aspects of the proposal remain unclear.

The college was consulted in line with other stake holders and will continue to be part of the consultation process.

We ask that this proposal be put on hold until it can be fully explored and understood by all parties.

Given that there is an acknowledgement by the parents, pupils and the school that a gap exists, the local authority needs to address this issue as soon as practicable. The provision must meet the needs of our children and young people, delaying the process means that some young people will not have the provision that meets their needs locally. In addition, the local authority will be vulnerable at any appeals that occur in the future.

Ideally we would like to develop a consensus with partners on the best way forward in this area.

In terms of the future, there will be the opportunity for close partnership working between the college and school - based provision.