

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 18 October 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - People

SUBJECT: Application for the development of a Special Free School for pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH)

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education and Social Care

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To summarise the process undertaken for applying for a Special Free School for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Approval be given for an application to establish a new joint special free school in Halton shared with St Helen's; and**
- 2) the Board agree the location of the school within Halton.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 In July 2018 the Department for Education invited Local Authorities to apply to establish special or alternative provision free schools in their borough. The guidance encouraged Local Authorities to seek partners in neighbouring authorities as part of the bid. This is to give a regional footprint to specialist provision. The bids must be made to the Regional Schools Commissioner in their area by October 15th 2018.
- 3.2 Any new school will be part of the government's free school programme. This means that the school will be an academy operated by an academy trust and set up through the presumption process. As part of this process the local authority is responsible for providing the site and the expectation is that it will be made available free or on a peppercorn basis by the local authority to the trust.
- 3.3 Local authorities are responsible for securing provision for children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC), funded from their high needs budget. However, in both Halton and St Helen's it has been identified that there is insufficient provision for pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health issues. This has meant that pupils in both authorities have been placed in expensive independent provision. The proposal is to develop shared provision.

- 3.4 The Local Areas of both Halton and St Helens have been inspected recently by Ofsted/CQC. They have been found in both inspections to have a good understanding of their strengths. In Halton inspectors reported that *“leaders generally have an accurate understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve”*.
- 3.5 Halton does not have a maintained social, emotional and mental health special school. St Helen’s has one which caters for boys only. However, both authorities have experienced growing demand. In 2017/2018 Halton and St Helen’s placed a total of 47 pupils in expensive independent special provision. 43% of this figure were looked after children.
- 3.6 In many cases not only is placement in independent provision costly but it also means that many of these pupils are educated away from their local community. They frequently have to travel long distances to school and this impacts on their ability to develop friendships and contacts within the local area. It also reduces the opportunity for transition back into mainstream education.
- 3.7 It is therefore proposed that Halton and St Helens bid for the opportunity to open a co-educational, special free school which will offer a quality educational experience for 50 pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs. The school will cater for a range of issues including but not restricted to a range of attachment disorders, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with challenging behaviour.
- 3.8 If approved the free school will provide placements for:
- Pupils with an Educational and health Care plan;
 - Pupils who have a primary need of SEMH
 - Be aged between 11-16 years.

The length of placement will meet the needs of each individual pupil.

- 3.9 It is intended that the school will have the capacity to deliver an outreach service after the second year of opening to help pupils from becoming excluded in the mainstream and add to the continuum of support for SEMH.
- 3.10 We are seeking a location in Halton for the new free school.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Department expects that any land identified by the Local Authority will be provided for free or there will be a peppercorn rent charged to the Trust that will run the free school.

- 4.2 The capital costs for development of the building will be met by the DfE if the application is successful.
- 4.3 Each local authority will commission places from the Free School and will pay for these places from their High Needs Funding. It is anticipated that by establishing this new provision there will be a reduction in the costs of placing pupils out of borough and a reduction in the costs of transport. Currently, the average cost of an Independent SEMH school for pupils is just over £54,000 plus the costs of transport. St Helen's currently have an SEMH school and the average cost of placements at this school is £26,000. If Halton placed 25 pupils per year this could cost £650,000 placing in independent provision could cost in the region of £1,350,000.
- 4.4 Should there be any additional capacity other neighbouring authorities have expressed an interest in commissioning this provision.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 If the application to develop a free schools is successful Halton and St Helen's will be required to identify a Trust sponsor through the presumption route.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Supporting pupils with SEMH in local schools is more inclusive as it allows pupils to be educated within their own community and alongside their peer group.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None identified

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The bases will provide support for pupils with social emotional and mental health difficulties.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None identified

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified

7.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 It is anticipated that establishing local SEMH provision will lead to a reduction in the rates of exclusions at secondary schools.

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 This proposal could have the effect of increasing demand for a special school place which risks long term outcomes for young people to live an independent life. To mitigate against this, it will be expected that the free school work collaboratively with local authority commissioners and schools across the boroughs to support re-integration where this can be achieved and to be a key partner with the continuum of provision for pupils with SEMH.

8.2 Where re-integration is not appropriate, the school will work with local post 16 planning and provision teams and develop strong links with FE providers and with employers to design appropriate pathways, with links into apprenticeships and supported internships.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1 The aim of the proposal is to improve the local offer for key stage 3 and 4 pupils with SEMH.

10.0 REASON FOR DECISION

10.1 Provide a more inclusive offer for pupils with SEMH giving them the opportunity to be educated with support alongside their peers.

11.1 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

11.1 Not submitting an application for a joint free school. However, lack of provision has an impact on the educational outcomes of pupils that need this support.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

12.1 Notification as to whether the bid has been successful will be announced by the DFE in Spring 2019.

13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
DFE – Guidance and Criteria For local authorities seeking to establish new special or alternative provision free schools – July 2018	DFE Website	Ann McIntyre Operational Director – Education, Inclusion and Provision ann.mcintyre@halton.gov.uk

