

Report



Cabinet Member for Education & Young People

Part 1

Date: 1st March 2016

Item No:

Subject New ASD School – reorganisation proposal

Purpose To seek Cabinet Member approval to move to the Formal Consultation stage of statutory consultation on the proposal “to establish a new Special School for pupils with Autism on the vacant site of the former Gaer Infant School, with effect from January 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter”.

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Ward All

Summary A previous school reorganisation proposal was carried out for the formal consultation stage on the proposal to establish a new school for pupils with the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). However, there were questions arising from that consultation on the detail of the site plans and accommodation on the site formerly known as Gaer Infants school. At the same time there was a change to the Statutory Code, the proposal was therefore ceased at that time and it is now appropriate to re-launch.

This report sets out how the site of the former Gaer Infant School is a suitable location to host a new school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) with an appropriate level of detail.

The aim of this reorganisation proposal is to provide access to education for pupils with Autism within the city, and to curtail the numbers of pupils needing to be transported out of the city on a daily basis.

The build scheme currently in progress on the Gaer site is expected to conclude by Christmas 2016, the establishment of the school from January 2017 would allow for set up of the school and to plan for transfers of pupils in a measured, systematic manner in full consultation with parents, carers and current providers.

Proposal To move to Formal Consultation on the proposal “to establish a new Special School for pupils with Autism on the vacant site of the former Gaer Infant School, with effect from January 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter”.

Action by Chief Education Officer

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Strategic Director – Place

- Strategic Director – People
- Education Senior Management Team
- Senior Human Resources Business Partner
- Senior Finance Business Partner
- Headteacher and Chair of Gaer Primary School
- Headteacher and Chair of Maes Ebbw Special School
- Chair of the EYDCP
- Curriculum Improvement Advisor – Behaviour & Autism
- 21CS Manager

Signed

Background

Following the amalgamation of the Gaer Juniors with the Gaer Infant School a considerable level of investment is taking place to provide for a consolidated Gaer Primary School. This will render the former Gaer Infant School vacant. It is a most appropriate education setting, in a location which also hosts the Gaer Annexe.

Site of former Gaer Infant School:

The former Gaer Infant School premises has the capacity for 180 mainstream pupils, in addition has capacity for 30 full time nursery places. The school has been assessed as suitable for the delivery of special education needs for pupils with the Autistic Spectrum Disorder and the delivery of education for up to 48 pupils.

A stand-alone building adjacent to the former Infant School – currently known as the Gaer Annexe hosts the Inclusion Advisory Team for Additional Education Needs, including Behaviour and Autism. This specialist team will be in a position to provide additional peer support to the staff working within this special education setting.

Considerations and appropriateness of the site evaluation for provision for pupils with Autism:

- Pupils with Autism generally need more space to move around in. It can be seriously disturbing to them if they are in a space with a lot of others with little space around themselves. There is a need to make sure that the planning of the school prioritises this need. This is particularly important in circulation areas. If pupils can move freely in an enjoyable, well-lit space, their sense of freedom and well-being will be immediately apparent.
- Schools are usually places with lots of different rooms for a variety of activities, such as classrooms, assembly spaces, quiet rooms, sensory rooms, staff offices and meeting rooms. However, what pupils with Autism need is a simple and easily understood route for getting from A to B. Long corridors with changes of direction, changes in level and confusing signs will add up to confusion in the mind of an autistic child and cause endless frustration which can result in difficult or challenging behaviour.
- The size of classrooms for pupils with Autism is difficult to determine because it can depend so much on where the pupil is on the spectrum.
- Each school's pupil intake will vary from year to year so it is difficult to anticipate how many low functioning pupils you will have in a given year. One solution might be to have classrooms that are divisible by folding partitions or doors, or have a variety of classroom sizes so that one or two are suitable for small groups of low functioning pupils.
- There can be quiet areas designated within the classroom itself, but these may not be as effective as they are not generally spaces with any sound separation; it is usually the sound of an upset and frustrated pupil that is so disturbing to others.
- Every effort should be made to provide a vehicle turning bay away from the main entrance, to avoid the need to reverse vehicles within the grounds of the building. Grounds may need to be laid out in a way that prevents pupils from leaving the site and finding themselves at risk. Where possible, the body of the building should provide an enclosed area and be linked to a discreet side fencing to the perimeter.
- Boundary fencing should be a minimum of 1.75 metres high, with the effect softened by planting fast-growing hedges and trees. Where possible, the grounds should be laid out to provide both fine and wet weather surfaces for recreation. An open-sided covered area is a tremendous advantage, as some pupils may need to spend time outside whatever the weather. Cover from rain is an obvious advantage, but some of the medications used to assist some people with autism can also cause over-sensitivity to strong sunlight.
- The grounds should permit the development of a 'private' garden area, within the whole, allowing pupils to choose privacy from the observation by others, while remaining within the safety of the grounds.

- Where possible, the grounds and buildings should lend themselves to recreational and hobby skill opportunities.

Statutory Consultation Process

The whole process will be taken forward under a Statutory Code for School Reorganisation on the proposal:

“To establish a new Special School for pupils with Autism on the vacant site of the former Gaer Infant School, with effect from January 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter”.

The formal consultation stage will ensure that all stakeholders, in particular pupils and their families and carers are able to find out more details of the reorganisation proposal. They will be invited to make comments and provide feedback on the issues. It is planned that the formal consultation process will commence mid-March and will last for 42 days.

After which, the Cabinet Member will be invited to review the findings through a consultation report which will also be published on the web site. The next stage would be for the Cabinet Member to take the decision to move to the publication of the Statutory Notice for a 28 day period. If there are no objections, the Cabinet Member can take the decision to establish the school. If there are objections the case will be referred to full Cabinet who will act as a Local Determination Panel.

Statutory Consultation Draft Timeline

- **22nd March 2016 – 4th May 2016** – Formal Consultation Period (42 days)
- **6th June 2016 – 4th July** – Publication of the Statutory Notice
- **July 2016** – final decision during this month

The decision process must take place to first move to formal consultation and then through each stage of the statutory consultation process, before a final determination is taken on whether to establish the new school for pupils with Autism.

Financial Summary

Capital Funding:

The 21st Century Schools Strategic Outline Plan in December 2010 and November 2011 made reference to the need for a Special School, and a level of financing was approved at £1m on the capital programme.

There are currently up to 48 children being transported out of the county on a daily basis on high cost transport to be educated in high cost settings. An Invest to Save proposal was also approved by Cabinet in 2010 which supports this scheme with financing at £2.8m on the capital programme.

The funding arrangements to support a new special school therefore will be from two sources:

- 21st century schools programme £1M – Capacity building for pupils with ASD
- Invest to Save £2.8M – Cabinet approval July 2010
- Total capital spend available £3.8m

The proposal to establish a new Special School for pupils with Autism will enable the transfer of the 12 pupils currently receiving education within the Maes Ebbw – Brynglas ASD unit. It will also enable provision potentially for pupils who are currently educated out of the city at the following locations:

- Ysgol Y Deri
- Craig y Parc
- Crownbridge

- Fairwater Comp
- Heronsbridge
- Penycwm
- Riverbank
- St John Lloyd
- Ysgol Ty Coch
- Ty Gwyn
- Trinity Fields

The concept design of the new special school for pupils with Autism has been discussed at length with the Head and the Chair of the Maes Ebbw Special School. The concept designs and dynamics of how the school would / could operate have been qualified by the Newport ASD Steering Group and also by colleagues working within the field of Additional Learning Needs in other local authority areas across South Wales.

Revenue Funding:

This would be a new additional school over and above the current number of schools in Newport, as a result additional levels of financing for staffing would be required.

Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Not to move to Formal Consultation	High	Low	The site has been identified through a robust asset management strategy and the levels of financing are appropriate to support this proposal	Chief Education Officer

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Council Improvement Plan
 Education Service Plan
 21CS Strategic Outline Plan

Options Available

Option 1: To move to Formal Consultation on the proposal to establish a new special school for pupils with Autism on the site of the former Gaer Infants School.

Option 2: Not to move to Formal Consultation, but to find alternative locations to deliver education for pupils with Autism

Preferred Option and Why

Option 1 is the preferred option – there are no alternative solutions to deliver the new special school for pupils with Autism that are suitable in Newport. The concept design and the dynamics of how the school would / could operate have been developed in company with stakeholders within the field of Additional Learning Needs. This will enable the families and their children to fully explore the proposal during Formal Consultation stage.

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There are no direct costs associated with the proposal within the report to move to formal consultation to establish a new ASD special school, and the report is therefore supported.

However, it should be appreciated that a significant amount of time has elapsed since the original report on the development of this school, and therefore before any more detailed reports following this are brought back before Cabinet Member, a total re-evaluation of the financial aspects of associated revenue funding of the running of the school should have taken place and evaluated against the projections within the original report.

There is approved capital budget of c. £3.8m for the project as set out in the financial summary. Early work will need to take place between Norse and the Education service to ensure that the costs of the project are fully costed and within the budget of £3.8m.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

The proposed action is in accordance with the statutory school reorganisation procedures set out in the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code. The proposal to establish a Special school for pupils with ASD on the vacant site of the former Gaer Infants School site needs to be formally published and subjected to formal consultation in accordance with the statutory procedure. In accordance with the statutory procedures, a detailed consultation document needs to be prepared, setting out the reasons for the proposals, and there has to be meaningful consultation with key stakeholders, including children and young people. A consultation period of at least 42 days has to be allowed (of which at least 20 should be school days). At the end of the statutory consultation period, a report will be prepared setting out the responses received and the Cabinet Member will be required to consider these representations before deciding whether or not to proceed with the necessary statutory notices.

Staffing Implications: Comments of Head of People and Business Change

There are no staffing implications as a result of this proposal within this report.

Local issues

None

Equalities Impact Assessment

An FEIA has been developed to support this decision stage attached as Appendix A and will be published on the Council web site.

Children and Families (Wales) Measure

Children and Young People will be a key stakeholder group for formal consultation on the proposal detailed within this report.

Background Papers

None

Dated: 1st March 2016