

Report subject	Somerford Primary School Resourced Provision
Meeting date	4 March 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>In line with the requirements of statutory guidance <i>Making significant changes to maintained schools</i>, the purpose of this report is to set out the proposal to establish a new Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School. The proposal forms part of the council's work to provide access to sufficient, specialist school places and is one a number of projects that will provide local places for local children in line with our statutory responsibilities to strengthen and expand high- quality SEND provision to meet growing demand.</p> <p>The proposal aims to address increasing pressure on school places resulting from the rising number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). A lack of sufficient local capacity has led to a higher number of placements in independent and non- maintained special schools (INMSS).</p> <p>By expanding provision within Somerford Primary School, the council seeks to build on the strengths of local settings and enable more children and young people to access appropriate education closer to home. Increasing local capacity in Christchurch will reduce reliance on costly out- of- area placements, which typically involve higher fees and significant transport costs. This approach not only supports better outcomes for pupils by allowing them to remain within their communities but also delivers long- term financial efficiencies for the Council.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>Cabinet agrees with the proposal to establish a new Resourced Provision for primary aged school children with SEND at Somerford Primary School with effect from 1 April 2026.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>To ensure sufficient school places for children with special educational needs in the Somerford and wider Christchurch area. Establishing a new 16-place Resourced Provision on the Somerford Primary School site will strengthen the Council's strategy of supporting children with additional needs within mainstream</p>

	education. This provision will combine the benefits of a mainstream school environment with tailored specialist support, enabling children with Education, Health and Care Plans to access high-quality learning and achieve their full potential.
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Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director Children's Services
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure sufficient school places, including appropriate provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Nationally and locally, demand for specialist provision has risen significantly due to sustained growth in the number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). This mirrors trends reported in other council areas, where the increasing prevalence of complex needs has placed pressure on both mainstream and specialist provision.
2. Across the local area, the number of maintained EHCPs has risen sharply in recent years and is forecast to continue to grow. This has contributed to increased demand for specialist placements and greater reliance on Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools (INMSS), which typically involve higher placement costs and require longer journeys for pupils. Other councils have similarly highlighted that insufficient local capacity has resulted in escalating expenditure on out-of-area placements and reduced opportunities for children to be educated within their own communities.
3. To address these pressures, the Council's SEND Sufficiency Strategy sets out the need to expand local specialist and inclusive provision. Establishing Resourced Provisions (RPs) within mainstream schools is recognised nationally as a key mechanism for enhancing local SEND capacity, supporting inclusion, and enabling pupils with EHCPs to receive tailored support while remaining part of their mainstream school. Councils such as Southampton and Wolverhampton emphasise that RPs help deliver a graduated approach, strengthen early intervention, and promote equitable access to mainstream opportunities.
4. Resourced Provisions reserve places for pupils with a specific type of need who are taught primarily in mainstream classes but benefit from access to a dedicated base and specialist facilities. These provisions are usually overseen by qualified SEND staff and provide small-group interventions, regulation spaces, targeted therapies, and structured support to help pupils learn, socialise and regulate effectively. This model has been adopted widely across councils to promote inclusion, reduce travel distances, and build capacity in local mainstream schools.
5. The introduction of a new Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School aligns with these strategic aims. The provision will support children with Social, Emotional

and Mental Health (SEMH) needs and/or Autism who require specialist support beyond what is ordinarily available in a mainstream setting. It forms part of a wider program to increase specialist places locally, reduce reliance on Independent and Non- Maintained Special school placements, and ensure children can access high- quality education close to home. This approach supports improved outcomes, strengthens inclusive practice across the area, and delivers better value for public resources in the long term.

The Proposal for New Resourced Provision

6. **Type of Provision:** The Council proposes to establish a new Special Educational Needs (SEN) Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School to provide up to 16 places for primary- aged pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) whose primary needs relate to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and/or Autism. The proposal constitutes a prescribed alteration under the *School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) Regulations 2013*, and the statutory consultation and publication requirements have been followed accordingly.
7. The need for this development arises from a well- documented increase in demand for specialist provision both nationally and locally. Growing numbers of children with EHCPs have placed increased pressure on existing specialist and mainstream provision, a trend mirrored in other local authorities where sharp rises in EHCPs have resulted in increased dependence on Independent and Non- Maintained Special Schools. Within Christchurch specifically, the lack of local specialist places has resulted in some pupils travelling considerable distances or being placed out of area. Establishing a Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School will address this gap and form a key component of the Council's strategy to strengthen local inclusion and reduce reliance on high- cost placements.
8. The proposed Resourced Provision will meet the needs of children who require more specialist support while still benefiting from consistent access to, and participation in, mainstream education. Pupils attending the Provision will remain part of their mainstream class and wider school community, accessing the curriculum alongside their peers wherever possible. Additional support will be provided through a dedicated base on site, which will offer a structured environment for therapeutic input, small- group teaching, regulation support and targeted interventions. This blended approach is consistent with SEND statutory guidance, which emphasises the importance of enabling pupils with EHCPs to attend mainstream settings wherever appropriate, and is reflected in similar proposals adopted by other councils.
9. The provision will be fully integrated into the school, reflecting its values of Enjoy, Achieve, Aspire, and fostering a sense of belonging for all pupils and will align with the SEND Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act 2014 by promoting inclusion and supporting parental preference for local provision.
10. **Accommodation:** To accommodate the Provision, Somerford Primary School will repurpose surplus classroom space within the existing school building complemented by access to a sensory room and designated outdoor space. Access to places will be phased across 2026 to enable the Resourced Provision to grow gradually to its full capacity of 16 places.
11. **Staffing:** Staffing the Provision will involve a combination of specialist and mainstream expertise. A qualified teacher with knowledge and experience of SEMH

and Autism will lead the Provision, supported by experienced teaching assistants. The school's SENCo will provide professional oversight, with the Headteacher retaining overall leadership responsibility. Alongside benefiting pupils within the Provision itself, the development will play a wider role in strengthening inclusive practice across the school and contributing to workforce development within the local system.

12. **Admissions:** Admissions to the Provision will be determined through the Council's SEND Panel as part of the statutory EHCP process, ensuring that placements are made transparently and in line with identified need. Assessments will consider whether the child's needs can be met within mainstream education with the additional support available through the Resourced Provision and whether the environment is appropriate to secure the outcomes set out in their EHCP.
13. **Governance:** Governance and monitoring arrangements will align with both school- level leadership structures and the Council's SEND governance framework. The Council will monitor the effectiveness of the Provision through pupil progress data, attendance, inclusion indicators and feedback from parents and pupils. This is consistent with the requirements of the SEN Improvement Test, which places emphasis on securing improved access, quality and outcomes for children with SEND.
14. **Community Benefits:** The establishment of a Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School is expected to bring substantial benefits for children, families and the wider community. As the first provision of its type in the Christchurch area, it will enable more children to be educated closer to home, reducing travel time and associated stress for families. It will also help to strengthen inclusive practice in mainstream schools locally and contribute to a more sustainable pattern of provision across the area. Similar initiatives in other local authorities have highlighted wider system benefits, including greater opportunities for mainstream- specialist collaboration and reductions in the reliance on costly out- of- area placements.
15. Overall, the proposal represents a strategically aligned and carefully designed expansion of specialist provision within mainstream education. It is intended to improve outcomes for children with SEMH and Autism needs, enhance inclusive capacity within Christchurch, and support the Council in meeting its statutory duty to secure sufficient and appropriate school places for all children.

Consultation

16. **Informal Consultation:** Prior to launching the statutory consultation, the Council undertook informal engagement with parents, school staff and local residents during December 2025 to gauge early views on the proposed establishment of a Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School. A total of 22 respondents provided feedback, and all were supportive of the proposal. The comments received reflected strong community recognition of the need for additional local SEND provision and confidence in the benefits the development would bring. Illustrative comments included:
 - This is a brilliant idea! We've been saying for ages this needs to happen." *Parent*
 - "Please, please make this happen, such a good idea." *Local resident*
 - "This is a great idea, providing much-needed support to SEN children in the area." *Parent*
 - "With increasing demands on local primary schools to make adjustments for pupils with EHCPs, with very little funding or adequate resources and training,

this would be a fantastic opportunity to cater for the needs of all children in the Christchurch area. It is important that schools remain inclusive and this will allow local families to get the support and opportunities that they need.” *Teacher*

17. This early feedback has informed the development of the proposal now presented for formal consideration.
18. **Formal Consultation:** The Council launched its formal statutory consultation on 12 January 2026, in accordance with the *School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) Regulations 2013*. The representation period will run until 9 February 2026. During this period, stakeholders are invited to submit comments on the proposal to establish a Resourced Provision at Somerford Primary School.
19. To ensure wide awareness, the consultation has been publicised through multiple channels, including:
 - an advert in the local newspaper.
 - publication on the Council’s website.
 - targeted communication issued to parents and staff of Somerford Primary School notifications to local headteachers, ward councillors and other statutory consultees.
20. The published proposal and consultation materials are available to view online at haveyoursay.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/somerford-send with the proposal document also available in this report as Appendix 1.
21. The outcome of the formal consultation has been added as appendix 2 to this report for Cabinet in March 2026 with full support for the proposal from participants. However, to meet report submission deadlines, this paper summarises the voluntary pre- publication feedback already received, noting strong early support for the proposal.

Options

22. Two options have been considered as follows:

Option 1: In line with the Council’s SEND Sufficiency Strategy and SEND and AP Improvement Plan, work with mainstream school headteachers to utilise surplus accommodation to co-locate Resourced Provision on mainstream school sites to increase the availability of local specialist places enabling children and families to access quality specialist support within their local area. Proposals require the council to follow the significant change process requiring consultation and consideration of representations as part of a formal decision-making process by the responsible body. In the case of schools maintained by the local authority, the responsible body is BCP Council.

Option 2: Maintain the status quo. Option 2 does nothing to expand the availability of local specialist places and fails to increase the options available locally for parents to express a preference to attend a school that serves their area. Option 2 fails to respond to the patterns of growth and increasing demand and complexity of need and fails to deliver on the council’s strategic intent.

Summary of financial implications

23. The proposed provision will utilise surplus school accommodation. The area identified requires condition works necessary to maintain the fabric of the building, and this will further ensure that the space is welcoming and suitable to provide an inclusive, quality teaching and learning space. The cost of the works is £250k and will be met using the Council's grant allocation of High Needs Provision capital. Details of the scheme are contained in the updated capital programme 2026/27 - 2028/29 and associated Capital Strategy Report 2026/27 - 2028/29 setting out the investment in schools necessary to deliver our strategic priorities.
24. The proposal will support the High Needs Block Recovery Plan by reducing reliance on costly Independent Non-maintained Special School (INMSS) placements and out of area settings, which costs significantly more than local provision. Based on a unit cost comparison of specialist provision versus INMSS (approximately £38k difference), the proposal for a 16 place Resourced Provision achieves cost avoidance in the region of £608k.

Summary of legal implications

25. The Council has clear statutory obligations to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can access *sufficient and appropriate* provision within its area.
26. The Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3) places duties on local authorities to identify and assess children and young people with SEND, secure the special educational provision specified in their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and keep provision under review to ensure sufficiency and quality. The Act explicitly requires joint commissioning and strategic planning across education, health and care partners (Sections 25–27), meaning any proposed changes must be consistent with these statutory collaborative duties.
27. **Education Act 1996 (Section 14)** places a duty on the local authority to ensure that there are sufficient schools in its area to provide “appropriate primary and secondary education” for all children, including those with SEND. These sufficiency duties extend to ensuring that any organisational changes do not compromise the local offer or parents’ rights under the SEND framework.
28. Any significant change proposal must therefore demonstrate that it maintains or enhances sufficiency, continues to meet assessed needs, and does not restrict access to provision required by law.

Summary of human resources implications

29. For a maintained school, the establishment of a Resourced Provision (RP) brings clear staffing responsibilities. The RP will fall under the leadership of the Headteacher and the operational oversight of the SENCo, requiring the school to recruit and deploy qualified SEN teachers and appropriately trained teaching assistants to deliver the specialist support expected. This will have implications for staffing structures, timetabling, line management arrangements, and ongoing professional development. The school will need to ensure staff are equipped with the specialist competencies required, supported through targeted CPD and supervision. Workforce development will be essential to ensure the RP can operate effectively and contribute to strengthening SEND expertise across the school.

Sustainability Impact

30. Establishing local provision contributes positively to the Council's sustainability objectives by reducing travel distances for pupils, which in turn lowers carbon emissions and transport related costs. It also supports wider active and sustainable travel ambitions, enabling more children to access education closer to home. In the longer term, strengthened local capacity reduces reliance on high cost out of area placements, contributing to both environmental and financial sustainability.

Summary of public health implications

31. Local specialist provision supports key public health objectives by reducing long journey and travel times. In turn this may help mitigate stress and fatigue for children with SEND and contribute to improved wellbeing and readiness for learning. Local places for local children further help strengthen inclusive local provision, promote community cohesion and thereby promote better mental health outcomes.

Summary of equality implications

32. An EIA conversation and screening exercise has been undertaken as part of the development of this proposal to ensure compliance with equalities duties. The completed assessment is available [here](#).

Summary of risk assessment

33. **Recruitment challenges:** Difficulty securing qualified SEN teachers and trained support staff may delay implementation. Mitigation: Early workforce planning, proactive recruitment, and collaboration with local special schools to provide outreach, mentoring and interim specialist support.
34. **Failure to approve the proposal:** If the proposal is not progressed, the local area will continue to rely on high cost Independent and Non Maintained Special School (INMSS) placements, increasing financial pressure and limiting local sufficiency. Mitigation: Clear articulation of cost avoidance, strengthened evidence base, and alignment with SEND Sufficiency priorities to support decision-making.
35. **Implementation delays:** Any delay in establishing the provision could impact parental confidence and place additional pressure on existing specialist settings. Mitigation: A phased implementation plan with defined milestones, project oversight, and early engagement with school leadership to ensure readiness
36. **Inconsistent practice or role clarity within the school:** Without clear expectations, there is a risk of variability in quality of provision. Mitigation: Defined roles, training, and support via the SENCo, alongside LA quality assurance processes.
37. **Demand exceeding capacity:** Higher than expected need could lead to oversubscription or pressure on resources. Mitigation: Ongoing monitoring of placement demand, flexible staffing models, and integration with the wider SEND sufficiency strategy.

Background papers

- Capital Programme 2026/27 – 2028/29
- SEND Sufficiency Strategy May 2024
- SEND and AP Improvement Plan 2025
- Belonging Strategy 2025

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consultation Paper – Somerford Primary School Proposal to Establish a new SEND Resourced Provision.

Appendix 2: Outcome of the consultation - Somerford Primary School Proposal to Establish a new SEND Resourced Provision