

Report subject	Linwood School Post-16 Place Expansion
Meeting date	22 July 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	In accordance with statutory guidance on making significant changes to maintained schools, this report sets out a proposal to expand post-16 provision at Linwood School's Skills Centre site. The proposed expansion supports the Council's statutory responsibility to secure sufficient specialist places and forms part of a broader programme to increase access to high-quality, local SEND provision. The proposal responds to growing demand for specialist places, driven by rising numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and the associated reliance on independent and non-maintained special schools and alternative provision. By making use of existing accommodation at the Skills Centre for post-16 delivery, the Council intends to strengthen local capacity, enabling more young people to access suitable education closer to home. Expanding provision in this way is expected to reduce dependence on costly out-of-area placements, which often incur higher fees and significant transport costs. It will also support improved outcomes by allowing young people to remain within their local communities, while delivering longer-term financial efficiencies for the Council.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: Cabinet agrees with the proposal to expand Linwood School's post-16 places at the Skills Centre, with effect from 1 September 2026.
Reason for recommendations	This recommendation is to support the increase of local specialist capacity using existing accommodation, reducing reliance on high-cost placements and transport, and improving cost control within the High Needs Block. It is the only option that supports financial sustainability.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Burton, Children and Young People
Corporate Director	Cathi Hadley, Corporate Director Children's Services
Report Authors	Lindsay Jackson, Head of Access to Education
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 accessible specialist post-16 places is recognised nationally as a key mechanism for supporting inclusion and enabling pupils with EHCPs to receive tailored support.
4. Linwood School seeks to enhance its current post-16 offer at the Skills Centre in Parkstone by creating 30 additional places, enabling more young people with SEND to access high-quality maintained specialist provision locally. Expanding maintained provision ensures greater continuity of support, closer alignment with the curriculum and therapeutic approaches with stronger oversight of quality through established local authority governance. It also reduces reliance on independent placements, which are typically higher-cost and often located outside the local area. By increasing local maintained capacity, the Council can offer more stable, inclusive pathways for young people, improve long-term outcomes, and deliver better value for money.

The proposal for the expansion of post-16 places

5. **Type of Provision:** The Council proposes to formally increase the available post-16 places provided by Linwood School at the recently established Skills Centre, based on Ashley Road in Parkstone from 30 to 60 places with effect from September 2026. This expansion will continue to support the ongoing education and development of young people age 16 to 19 years old with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The proposal constitutes a significant change, under the "*Making*

significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools 2025", and the required publication and statutory consultation requirements have been followed accordingly.

6. The need for this expansion 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. The lack of specialist places has resulted in some pupils travelling considerable distances or being placed out-of-area. Expanding the number of available places to young people 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.
7. The site will continue to be fully integrated within the Linwood School family, reflecting its values and fostering a sense of belonging for all pupils, aligning with the SEND Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act 2014 by promoting inclusion and supporting parental preference for local provision.
8. **Accommodation:** The proposed expansion of post-16 places will be through existing floorspace within the Skills Centre with no requirement for building modification or refurbishment.
9. **Staffing:** If required, additional qualified SEN teachers and teaching assistants will be appointed to meet the needs of students.
10. **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 environment is appropriate to secure the outcomes set out in their EHCP.
11. **Governance:** Governance and monitoring arrangements will align with Linwood School's leadership structures and the Council's SEND governance framework. The Council will monitor the effectiveness of the Skills Centre 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 and young people with SEND.
12. **Community Benefits:** The place expansion at the Skills Centre is expected to bring substantial benefits for young people, families and the wider community. It will enable more young people to be educated closer to home, reducing travel time and associated stress for families. It will also contribute to a more sustainable pattern of provision across the area.
13. Overall, the proposal represents a strategically aligned and careful expansion of specialist provision. It is intended to improve outcomes for young people with a diverse set of learning difficulties and complex needs, enhance inclusive capacity within Parkstone and the wider area, and support the Council in meeting its statutory duty to secure sufficient and appropriate school places for all children and young people.

Consultation

14. The Council launched its formal statutory consultation on 11 May 2026, in accordance with the *School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) Regulations 2013*. The representation period ended 15 June 2026.
15. To ensure wide awareness, the consultation was publicised through multiple channels, including:
 - an advert in the local newspaper.
 - publication on the Council's website and through social media.
 - targeted communication issued to parents and staff of Linwood School and notifications to local headteachers, local early years settings and other statutory consultees.
16. The consultation received 16 responses, with the outcome attached as Appendix 1. Overall, feedback demonstrated a mixed but broadly supportive position, with most respondents in favour of the proposal, including comments such as:
 - "Increasing capacity means that many more young people will now have access to the high level, specialist support they need not just to succeed, but to truly thrive."
 - "The focus on independence, employability, communication skills and preparation for adulthood is particularly positive".
 - "I think it is a much needed provision as there are never enough spaces for SEND students."
 - "The amount of young people coming out of education NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) is rising and this will help to rectify this issue within our local area."
 - "This will enable more young people with SEND to have the choice of opportunity for a Post 16 provision within BCP."
17. Some objections and concerns were raised which are addressed below to ensure transparency and informed decision-making:
 - "This is a high density housing neighbourhood on a road which becomes badly congested so that the prospect of up to 30 more cars arriving in the areas to drop off and pick up every day must be addressed."
 - "The level of need and specialist support some of the students require makes it inappropriate to have large class sizes."
 - "Stop spending all of local taxpayers money on SEND. This money could be spent on initiatives to benefit everyone. Let parents look after their own children's education and welfare."
 - "There is not adequate space or teaching resources. There is a small amount of teachers so this will lead to bigger class sizes with inadequate support. This will lead to increased deregulation."

18. Provision is organised into small, needs-led cohorts consistent with SEND practice and so the increase of places from 30 to 60 will not result in large teaching groups. Delivery is structured through personalised timetables and supported activities, ensuring learning remains individualised.
19. The Skills Centre has capacity to accommodate additional learners and uses existing space without requiring capital development. Provision is delivered across a range of practical and learning environments, with a phased implementation supporting a controlled expansion.
20. Additional SEN staff will be appointed as required, with provision driven by EHCP outcomes to ensure staffing levels reflect learner need. This approach maintains quality and ensures appropriate expertise is in place.
21. In June 2025, BCP's Highways response to the planning application to change the use from a family centre to a post-16 special education school forecast that the change to an education use would result in a reduction of traffic flow to the site. This was due to the family centre hosting activities spread across the day delivered by multiple organisations. The number of staff journeys to site is comparable in both uses but analysis of Linwood's existing cohort showed that pupils predominantly arrive at site by minibus, with some young people using public transport as part of their travel independence training. Analysis of the existing Linwood post-16 cohort showed only 8 pupils using private transport or taxi, which is substantially smaller rather than the expected 60+ site users a day for the family centre. BCP Highways reviewed this strategy as part of the Planning Application and made no objections. Bicycle shelters have been added to the site in line with planning conditions. A copy of BCP Highways team response to the original Planning Application is attached as Appendix 2.
22. The Council has a statutory duty to provide SEND places, and local provision supports better outcomes, including independence and employability. Increasing local capacity also reduces reliance on more costly placements.

Options Appraisal

23. In consideration of the consultation results two options have been considered:

Option 1: Expand local specialist provision (Preferred Option)

This option increases local specialist capacity through use of existing accommodation, in line with the Council's SEND Sufficiency Strategy and SEND and AP Improvement Plan. It reduces reliance on high-cost independent and out-of-area placements and associated transport expenditure and provides a clear mechanism to manage demand-led pressures and improve cost control within the High Needs Block. This option requires completion of the statutory 'significant change' process, with consultation responses considered prior to a formal decision by BCP Council.

This option supports financial sustainability and improved budget control.

Option 2: Maintain the status quo (Do nothing)

This option does not increase local capacity and would:

- Sustain high-cost placement reliance with limited cost control
- Drive continued growth in transport expenditure
- Increase exposure to demand-led pressures and reactive spend
- Reduce the Council's ability to manage High Needs expenditure, increasing deficit risk

This option would result in ongoing cost escalation and reduced financial resilience and is not financially sustainable.

Summary of financial implications

24. The proposed provision will utilise existing floorspace with the Skills Centre with no requirement for capital funding to accommodate the expansion of places.
25. The Post 16 Skills Centre will be commissioned as a Linwood satellite using the current Linwood Banding Locators. This reduces the need to use high-cost external placements.

Setting	SEND Top up	DfE Place Funding	Total
Linwood School - Locators 2, 3, 4 & 5	£9,844.86	£10,000	£19,844.86
Linwood School - Locator 6	£12,747	£10,000	£22,747
Linwood School - Locator 7	£19,572	£10,000	£29,572

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 £35k difference), the proposal for an additional 30 post-16 places achieves cost avoidance in the region of £1m, contributing meaningfully to reducing the High Needs Block deficit.

Summary of legal implications

26. The Council has statutory duties to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can access *sufficient and appropriate* education within its area.
27. Under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the Council is required to identify and assess children and young people with SEND, and to secure the special educational provision specified in their Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The Council must also keep education and training provision for children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND under review to ensure sufficiency, quality and effectiveness. These duties are reinforced through requirements for joint commissioning and integrated working across education, health and care partners (Sections 25–27), and must be delivered in accordance with the SEND code of Practice (0-25).

28. The Education Act 1996 (Section 14) further requires the Council to secure sufficient primary and secondary education provision for children in its area.
29. The proposed expansion constitutes a prescribed alteration to a maintained school and must comply with the statutory process set out in the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, including requirements for publication, consultation and decision-making.
30. In determining the proposal, the Council must therefore be satisfied that it supports the delivery of sufficiency and appropriate provision, meets assessed needs, and is consistent with its statutory duties.

Summary of human resources implications

31. Linwood School will ensure that appropriate staffing capacity and specialist expertise are in place to support the increased number of post-16 learners.
32. As the provision will be delivered within the existing school structure, workforce planning, recruitment and deployment of staff will be managed through the school's established leadership and governance arrangements. This may include the use of existing staff capacity alongside, where required, the recruitment of additional suitably qualified teaching and support staff.
33. Any staffing changes will be progressed in line with the school's usual HR policies and procedures, including consideration of staff development, training and retention to ensure the continued delivery of high-quality SEND provision.

Summary of sustainability impact

34. 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 young people 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

35. 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 young people with SEND and contribute to improved wellbeing and readiness for learning. Local places for local young people further help strengthen inclusive local provision, promote community cohesion and thereby promote better mental health outcomes.

Summary of equality implications

36. The Council has had due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010. An EIA conversation and screening exercise has been undertaken as part of the development of this proposal to ensure compliance with equalities duties.
37. In summary, the proposal primarily benefits young people with SEND (disability) by increasing access to appropriate local post-16 provision, supporting improved educational outcomes and reducing travel burden for pupils and families. Positive impacts are also expected for parents and carers, including improved engagement and reduced cost and time pressures. Limited adverse impacts may arise during

transition into expanded provision and through increased workforce pressures; these will be mitigated through phased implementation, EHCP-led placement decisions and ongoing monitoring. No differential impacts have been identified for other protected characteristics. Overall, the proposal supports greater inclusion and equitable access to education.

38. The completed EIA assessment is available [here](#).

Summary of risk assessment

39. **Workforce capacity and delivery risk:** Expansion introduces risk that staffing capacity does not scale in line with growing and increasingly complex demand, potentially impacting quality of provision and pupil outcomes. Mitigation: Schools to ensure that workforce planning is aligned to phased pupil intake, with flexibility to deploy existing staff and recruit incrementally where required. Ongoing demand forecasting and funding review will ensure staffing models remain sustainable and appropriate.
40. **Strategic sufficiency and financial risk (if not approved):** Failure to approve the proposal would perpetuate reliance on high-cost Independent and Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) placements, increasing pressure on the High Needs Block and limiting local sufficiency. Mitigation: The proposal is supported by a strong evidence base, aligns with SEND Sufficiency Strategy and Recovery Plan and delivers measurable cost avoidance alongside improved local capacity.
41. **Programme delivery and implementation risk:** Delays to implementation may constrain place availability, increase pressure on existing provision and impact parental confidence and statutory sufficiency duties. Mitigation: A structured implementation plan with defined milestones, early engagement with school leadership, and programme oversight through place sufficiency governance arrangements.
42. **Demand and capacity risk:** If demand exceeds planned capacity, there is a risk of oversubscription, increased out-of area placements, and pressure on system-wide resources. Mitigation: Regular monitoring of demand and placement trends, alignment with the wider sufficiency planning, and use of flexible delivery models to respond to emerging need.

Background papers

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

Appendices

Appendix 1: Outcome of the Consultation Paper – Linwood School Proposal to Expand Post-16 Places

Appendix 2: Highways Response to Planning Application P-25-01070-PNVS