



Notification of proposal by Buckinghamshire Council to open a Communication and Interaction (Autism) Unit at Overstone Combined School

Contact details

Proposal, published by Buckinghamshire Council, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF, to open a Communication and Interaction (Autism) Unit at Overstone Combined School, Church Street, Wing, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 0NY.

Implementation

It is proposed to open a Communication and Interaction (Autism) Unit with effect from 1st September 2025

Reason for the Proposal

The [SEN Sufficiency Strategy](#) for Buckinghamshire identified the need for a 12 place primary age inclusion unit for children with Communication and Interaction (Autism) needs at a mainstream school in Aylesbury Vale. The Local Authority has evidenced that those children and young people, with Communication and Interaction needs (Autism) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH) are our fastest growing areas of need in the Aylesbury Vale area. As such, we have concluded that additional resources must be targeted in this area.

Proposal to open a Communication and Interaction (Autism) Unit

Over the last five years, the number of Special Educational Needs and Disabled (SEND) pupils with an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) has increased by 64% (2577 pupils) across Buckinghamshire. Current projections forecast a further 56% increase in the number of EHCP pupils over the next five years.

Children and young people with communication and interaction needs is one of the areas of need that has been rising most (1642 or 82% over the last 5 years) with projections forecasting a further increase of 1942 pupils or 53% over the next 5 years.

Our SEND Education Sufficiency Strategy identified the need for a 12 place primary age inclusion Unit for children with Communication and Interaction (Autism) needs at a mainstream school in Aylesbury Vale. To meet this demand, we are proposing to open a Communication and Interaction (Autism) Unit at Overstone Combined School, Wing. This would be a 12 place Unit for pupils with Communication and Interaction (Autism) needs as detailed in their Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP). Only children whose EHCP stated they needed support from a unit would be admitted and admissions will be controlled by the SEND team; parents would not be able to apply directly to the school for a place in the Unit.

Overstone Combined School currently has a Planned Admission Number (PAN) of 42 pupils in each year group. However, pupil numbers are well below these levels. In order to facilitate this proposal, Overstone Combined School are consulting separately to reduce the school's PAN to 30 in Key Stage 1 and 32 in Key Stage 2. The change in PAN is subject to a separate consultation by the school governors (by following the process set out in paragraphs 1.45-1.52 of the Admissions Code) and, assuming it is agreed, the new PAN would come into effect from September 2026. The 12 places in the Unit would be in addition to the 218 mainstream places at the school. If the decision is made not to reduce the PAN, the LA will need to consider whether or not to proceed with the opening of the Unit.

A key aim of the Unit is to enable pupils to access a mainstream curriculum, whilst accessing specific specialist support. Pupils attending the Unit would spend most of their time based within the new Unit. The new Unit will be self-contained with its own outside play area. Pupils in the Unit will be able to join in with parts of the school day, where appropriate.

Specialist teachers would be employed to manage the new Unit. All staff working in the Unit will have received specialist training on supporting children with Autism. The Unit will be staffed with two teachers and learning support assistants; additional professionals will support the children including a speech and language therapist and occupational therapist. Additional professionals will be employed depending on the needs of the children, such as speech and language therapists, occupational health professionals, a play therapist etc. These additional adults will be appointed based on the needs of the children which will be stated on their EHCPs.

Overstone Combined School staff would also have additional training in neuro-diversity, building on existing expertise in that area. As the children in the Unit will be part of the school, it is important all staff understand how to support children with autism needs - this level of expertise will benefit all children at the school and not just those in the Unit.

Project costs and an indication of how these will be met

The new Unit would be accommodated in refurbished rooms at the front of the school. As part of the works to create the new Unit, the calm room and wrap around care/food tech room would be relocated in refurbished rooms elsewhere in the school building. The Unit will have its own outdoor play area on the site of the old swimming pool which was removed over the summer.

The cost of the refurbishment will be funded using government funding that has been made available for providing new/expanding existing SEND provision across the county.

Additional revenue funding would be provided to fund the Unit. It would therefore not have a detrimental impact on the school's existing revenue budget or impact on provision for pupils.

Statutory process for prescribed alterations

The Local Authority and Governing Board is required to publish statutory proposals when it seeks to make a significant change to a school. The statutory process is summarised below:

Stage 1: Consultation - Proposers must consult with the parents of registered pupils at the school and should consult with key stakeholders including:

- the governing board
- the diocese or relevant faith group of school's affected by the proposal
- teachers and other staff at the school

- any LA likely to be affected by the proposal
- the governing bodies, teachers and other staff of any other school that may be affected
- parents of any pupils at other schools who may be affected by the proposal
- any trade unions who represent staff at the school
- MPs whose constituencies include the school that is the subject of the proposal or whose constituents are likely to be affected by the proposal
- any other interested organisation / person that the proposer thinks are appropriate

Stage 2: Statutory Proposal – the proposal must be published within 12 months of the initial consultation stage; this must contain sufficient information for interested parties to make a decision on whether to support or challenge the proposed change.

Stage 3: Representation - once proposals are published there follows a four week statutory period during which representations (e.g. objections or comments) can be made. The representation period is the final opportunity for people and organisations to express their views about the proposals.

Stage 4: Decision – the Council must decide proposals within two months of the end of the representation period, otherwise the proposal will be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.

Stage 5: Implementation – In general, proposals should be implemented within three years of their publication.

Outcome of the Consultation Stage

The first stage consultation process on a Proposal to open a 12 place Communication and Interaction Unit at Overstone Combined School commenced on 30th September 2024 and concluded on 10th November 2024. In line with statutory requirements the consultation letter was promoted via a dedicated webpage and survey on Your Voice Bucks and also sent directly to a number of consultees.

In line with statutory requirements a consultation letter was sent to all parents/carers of children on roll at the School, governors and staff at the School, schools in the local area, all special schools and other statutory consultees. Copies of the consultation letter were also sent to the following stakeholders:

- Local residents
- Local MP, Councillors, Parish Council
- Trade Union representatives
- Church Diocese representatives
- FACT Bucks

In addition, two meetings were held at the school. The first, a briefing session for parents/carers, was held on Monday 14th October at 5pm which was attended by around 14 people. LA officers were also in attendance at the meeting to answer questions from parents/carers/staff. The second, a drop in session for the wider public/local residents, was held at the school on Monday 14th October from 6pm - 7pm so that people could drop in to look at the plans and ask any questions that they had. One member of the public attended this meeting. A separate meeting to brief local councillors on the proposal was held at 9:30am on October 2nd 2024 .

The Council received 24 responses to the consultation proposal. 19 of these came in via the Your Voice consultation page and 5 came to the consultation mailbox or by post to the School Commissioning Team.

In summary of the 24 who responded 17 (71%) were in agreement with the proposal to open a Communication and Interaction Unit, 5 (21%) did not agree and 2 (8%) didn't know.

Agree/Disagree with proposal to open Unit	Responses Received
Agree with proposal to open	17
Disagree with proposal to open	5
Don't know	2
Total	24

All of the 24 respondents said they understood why a proposal to open a Communication and Interaction (Autism) Unit at Overstone had been made.

Timetable for these proposals

The proposed timetable below, which may be subject to change, sets this timeline and next steps out:

Start Date	End Date	Description
26 th November 2024	23 rd December 2024	Subject to the decision above: Publication of Statutory Notice and formal 4 week representation period
27 th December 2024	17 th February 2025	Buckinghamshire Council and School Governing Board review the responses from the consultation. Leader of Buckinghamshire Council in consultation with Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services takes a decision on the final outcome
May 2025	31 st August 2025	Subject to the outcome above, building works commence/finish.
1 st September 2025		Subject to the outcome above, the Unit will open.

Procedure for making representations (objections and comments)

Within four weeks of the date of publication of this proposal, any person may agree, object to, or make comments on the proposal online via the Buckinghamshire Council consultation website: <https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/>

Alternatively, representations can be made by email to: overstoneschoolconsultation@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

or by post to:



The School Commissioning Team
Buckinghamshire Council
1st Floor
Walton Street Office
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire, HP20 1UZ

The closing date for comments is 11:59pm on Monday 23rd December 2024.

