


Social, Emotional and Mental Health School in Lancaster

Information for Academy Sponsors





Lancashire County Council (LCC) is inviting expressions of interest from Academy Proposers interested in sponsoring a new 54 place school for pupils with social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. The school will be delivered on the former Firbank Childrens Centre Site in Lancaster and is expected to open in September 2024. This document provides the background and specification for the new school, how it will be funded, the expected timescales for its development, information regarding how you can express an interest for its operation and how we will assess the strength of your application.

The closing date for expressions of interest is 12 noon on Friday 15th September 2023





Introduction

In Lancashire we have a vision for provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disability, we want all pupils to receive the best teaching and learning, be educated in fully inclusive settings, be cared for in safe and supportive families, participate and be involved in their communities and lead happy, safe, and fulfilled lives.

In terms of specialist provision, we would like, as far as possible, for all children and young people to be educated close to their home in educational settings appropriate to their needs, because we recognise the value of children and young people remaining within their locality and being part of the community wherever possible.

In recent years, both nationally and locally there has been a marked increase in demand for specialist educational placements for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, particularly for those having autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

It is proposed to develop a 54 place School for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs that is located in Lancaster to serve the northern part of the County.

The school will cater for pupils aged from five to 11 years of age.

The school will be located in a refurbished children's centre and the opening date is subject to confirmation with the Department for Education. Pupils admitted to this school will have an education health and care plan (EHCP), therefore admissions will be co-ordinated through the Lancashire Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) teams.

The school will be wholly funded by the DfE Free School Programme. An allocation for start-up and post opening revenue costs for the new school will be agreed with the successful Academy Sponsor in due course.

This document provides further detail for Academy Sponsors and other interested parties, why we believe a new school will provide the best solution to improve choice, and standards for our children and young people with SEND and their families, where it will be located, how this will be funded, how we expect this to be run, and the process and timeline that we intend to follow.

Please take time to read this information carefully and make contact using the details provided should you require any further information.



Background

Nationally there is an increasing demand for places in specialist education provision for children and young people with SEND.

In February 2023 Lancashire had 9,665 Education, Health and Care Plans. This represents a 40% increase since 2019. This has been accompanied by a 11% increase in demand for special school places, which equates to an overall increase of 368 special school places, although it should be noted that not all places are within schools located within the Lancashire border and 511 special school places are within the independent, non-maintained sector.

The overall cost for pupils attending independent and non-maintained schools in February 2023 was £25.1 million. Based on current performance it is anticipated this will continue to increase. This is because while the numbers of pupils attending schools within the independent non-maintained sector have remained constant over the last five years the average cost of these school placements has been subject to a 11.1% increase since 2022. In February 2023 the average cost of a school place within the independent non-maintained sector was £49k whereas in 2022 the average cost was £45k.

The further anticipated growth will place an unprecedented demand on our available budgets. Lancashire County Council needs to ensure that action is taken to ensure that available funds are used wisely and to make sure that every child has access to appropriate education provision to meet their needs.

The development of a new school will help improve choice for both parents, carers and pupils and will have the added benefit of enabling more pupils to be educated in their locality/community. This may bring added benefits to families including reducing the journey time to school. It is not envisaged that the new school will meet the needs of all children and we will continue to place pupils in other specialist provision where there is in the best interest of the child.

Another benefit of creating a new special school is that the specialist resources and staff working in this establishment will be able to share their expertise so that all providers, including mainstream schools, in the area can benefit from the knowledge and advice available.



Current arrangements

The following table illustrates the previous and expected future growth in demand for SEND placements in Lancashire.

Forecast Growth	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Lancashire Special Schools	3122	3198	3346	3466	3586
SEN units	16	48	96	144	160

Specification

Location of the New School

The new school will be located at the former Firbank Children's Centre, Firbank Road, Lancaster LA1 3HL



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How will this be established

The Education Act 2011 changed the arrangements for establishing new schools and introduced Section 6A, now known as the 'Free School Presumption' to the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

The legislation requires that where the County Council considers there is a need for a new school in its area; it must seek proposals from suitably qualified organisations to establish the new school as a Free School.

Potential Academy Sponsors who are not already known to the DfE and included on their approved register are advised to contact the DfE at the earliest opportunity, to find out more about the approval process, and certainly before submitting a formal application to the County Council.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1130565/Free_school_presumption_guidance.pdf



How the new school will be refurbished?

Where those elements of the building fall below current standards or are of poor condition, they will be upgraded or replaced in line with current building regulations and DfE guidelines where applicable and this work will be undertaken by Lancashire's property team. It is possible that the refurbishment will be underway by the time the academy sponsor is appointed and therefore sponsors may not have the opportunity for involvement in the refurbishment project.

Lease arrangements

On a date to be agreed with the approved Academy Sponsor prior to the opening of the new school, the site and buildings will be leased by the County Council on a 125-year lease arrangement as prescribed by the DfE.

Opening arrangements

The exact opening arrangements for the new school are yet to be agreed and will be determined in discussion with the successful Academy Sponsor mindful of the demand for places at the time. However, at this stage it is envisaged that the new school will grow incrementally based on the emerging demand for places from Lancashire pupils having a social, emotional and mental health needs as their primary assessed need and an education, health and care plan. It is proposed that the school will offer 20 pupil places within the first year of opening and will offer a further 20 places in year two and the remaining 14 places in year three

The Academy will be expected to be flexible in how classes are organised to respond to the demand for places, and the age and development profile of those placed at the school

The organisational structure is proposed to be delivered across four teaching groups comprising one teaching group for pupils in years 1 and 2 to accommodate key stage 1 pupils and they would be taught in class bases that will accommodate six pupils

The pupils in years 3 and 4 and years 5 and 6 will be accommodated in class bases for up to eight pupils



Age range

The school is intended to serve pupils between the ages of five and 11 years. The County Council will keep the demand for places under review and where required will discuss with the appointed Academy Sponsor any emerging need for any change to the age range of the school

Gender

The school will be open to all genders

Admission criteria

The County Council requires that Academy Sponsors abide by the national SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) in order to admit pupils where:

- the school is suitable for the age, ability, aptitude or SEN of the child or young person,
- the attendance of the child or young person at the school is compatible with the efficient education of others, or the efficient use of resources.

The local authority is required to comply with a request from a child's parent unless the placement of the child would not be consistent with the criteria listed above.

Equality and diversity

All potential Academy Sponsors are required to demonstrate their commitment to inclusion, to promoting equality and diversity and to eliminating unlawful discrimination and harassment.

Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA)

Included in Appendix A



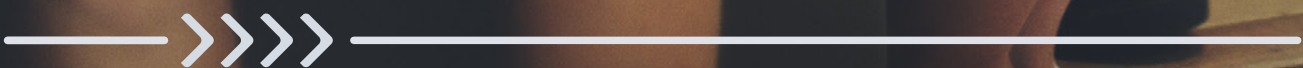
Extended services

The County Council expects the Academy sponsor to collaborate and engage with other providers and local partners to develop extended services which meet the needs of children, young people and families in a coordinated, holistic way.

These services may include access to out of hours learning activities and clubs, parenting support and community-based projects and potentially include social enterprises.

Academy Proposers are asked to provide evidence in their application of their commitment towards the development of extended provision at the new school.





Home to school transport

The Council will expect the Academy Sponsor to encourage safe and sustainable travel to the new school, including walking and cycling, and to develop a comprehensive travel plan to support this for staff, pupils and visitors.

If eligible, Home to school transport will be provided, in line with the County Council's Home to School/College Transport policy i.e., when this school is identified as the nearest suitable education provision within a child's education, health and care plan.

Transport for eligible pupils will be provided for those pupils living at over 2 miles walking distance for primary age children and at over 3 miles for secondary age children. Details of the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy is available at: <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/council/strategies-policies-plans/children-education-and-families/school-transport/>

Funding arrangements

As this new school will be an Academy, the successful Academy Sponsor will need to enter into a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education, for the operation of the school to be effective from the date of the school's opening.

The new school will be funded on the number of commissioned places agreed between the Council and the Academy Sponsor in accordance with The Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations. The amount per place will be £10,000 supplemented by top up funding appropriate to each pupils needs.



Application process

Academy Sponsors wishing to express an interest in the new S school for primary aged pupils identified as having social, emotional and mental health needs should do so by completing the application form available online.

You need to complete a free school application, which consists of two forms (an Excel form for criteria sections A and B, and a Word form for criteria sections C, D, E and F). You must use the forms provided on GOV.UK.

Submit your application by e mail to
Janette Hastings at Janette.hastings@lancashire.gov.uk
FreeSchool.PRESUMPTION@education.gov.uk

Please note the closing date for submissions is 12 noon on Friday 15th September 2023



Having invited Expressions of Interest from Academy Proposers, a detailed evaluation will be undertaken in accordance with the assessment criteria provided within this document, and the accompanying application form.

A two-stage process will be followed to determine the County Council's preferred Academy sponsor for the new school, comprising of the initial written application, and followed by a presentation and interview by shortlisted Sponsors, and where appropriate, a visit to an existing similar Academy that they currently operate.

Each stage of the application process will be allocated a score, and for those Academy Sponsors shortlisted to the second stage, the total scores for each stage will be aggregated to determine an overall evaluation mark to determine a preferred sponsor. Further details of the scoring methodology to be used to evaluation are provided within the accompanying Application Form.

This will enable consideration by the County Council Cabinet of a preferred sponsor. Subject to the Cabinet's consideration, a submission will be made to the Regional Director (RD), who is acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education, which will include all proposals received, with the Local Authority's assessment of these to assist the RD in their decision.

The RD will carefully consider the County Council's submission and assuming agreement, will then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Education who will make the final decision.

Once a decision has been made, the County Council will work closely with the chosen sponsor and the DfE (through the Education Skills and Funding Agency) to conclude the development and operational details of the new school.



Proposed timeline

The County Council has been notified by the Department for Education of the conditional approval to establish the new school, and the process for this. The expected timescales for the development of the new school are subject to agreement between the DfE and the County Council, however, we would like the school to be open as soon as possible.

The table below sets out a provisional timeline for the assessment, approval and implementation.

Process Involved	Proposed Timeline
Invitations for Expressions of Interest published	July 2023
Deadline for submitting your application in these competitions	September 2023
Refurbishment Plans for the new school	January 2024
DfE input into shortlisting	September 2023
Stage 1: Shortlisting of applications	September 2023
Stage 2: Interviews start (including presentation by and interview of shortlisted proposer)	October 2023
Visit to Academies	October 2023
Decision taken by Cabinet on preferred Academy Proposer	November 2023
LCC submission of applications to RSD for a decision	November 2023
Secretary of State approval – Approved Applications Announced	December 2023
LCC will advise unsuccessful applicants	December 2023
Statutory consultation (required under S10 of the Academies Act 2010)	December 2023
Identified Academy Trust to enter into funding agreement with the Secretary of State	TBC
Refurbishment works completed	July 2024
New school Opens	September 2024

The timescales are subject to confirmation and change as specific dates are in the control of the DfE and not the Local Authority.



Assessment criteria

The County Council will consider the evidence provided by the proposer to satisfy itself that the sponsor has the capacity and intention to meet the following criteria:

- The capacity to establish a new school based on high expectations and high performance to continue to drive up practice and outcomes for pupils with SEND.
- A strong desire and vision to work closely with other education providers and associated agencies for SEND in the locality and further afield to promote partnership working, inclusion, and community cohesion.
- Evidence of a proven track record of school improvement or sustained high standards and how the proposed governance model will drive and support successful outcomes.

The County Council will submit all assessment information to the Secretary of State (via the Regional Schools Director) who will in turn appoint a sponsor. The Secretary of State will then enter into a funding agreement with the Academy Sponsor.

The DfE will focus on the following criteria:

- The capacity and quality of the new sponsor will be assessed on their strategic vision, educational capacity and performance, financial planning and operational capacity and governance. The focus for existing sponsors will be on their track record and credibility, capacity to deliver a new project and their local infrastructure to support their proposal.
- The ability of the sponsor to deliver on time, to secure best value for money and maintain financial viability. This will need to be made clear in a comprehensive financial plan based on realistic assumptions.
- The sponsor's ability to promote high standards as set out in a clear and coherent education plan, and which demonstrates innovation to drive system change. The proposal should give strong, credible evidence that the new school will raise the overall standard of education for those pupils with SEND and adding high quality places to the system.



Delivering excellence in education

The County Council's vision for Lancashire is to make this the very best place for children, young people and their families. To achieve this our mission is to ensure that our children and young people are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities.

Sponsors must have an ambitious vision for the Academy, setting high expectations for both pupils and staff. There should be a strong culture of working in collaboration with other schools, support services and education providers locally and in other parts of Lancashire.

Academy Sponsors must also be able to demonstrate their approach to effective engagement with partner agencies and services which contribute to improving outcomes for children with SEND.

Relationships with pupils, parents and carers and other local stakeholders should be open, purposeful and viewed positively by all.

Leadership and governance

The Council regards strong leadership and governance as a key component to delivering improved outcomes for children and young people in our schools.

Teaching and learning

The County Council has an aspiration for all Lancashire schools to be good or outstanding. The new school should expect to be judged by Ofsted to be at least good, with a strong trajectory towards outstanding. The new school should therefore aspire to perform well above national figures against a range of key indicators.

Key outcomes for this school should focus on preparing pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs to be best prepared for adult life both academically, socially and emotionally whilst also enabling the world around them to have a better understanding of their needs.

To help children reach their potential the school will create a learning environment suitable to their needs. This should include:



- A balanced curriculum which is enjoyable, fulfilling and challenging and that will enable to pupils to optimise their learning potential
- Access to the skills, knowledge and experience that will equip pupils for the future employment
- A learning environment that is calm and ordered and in which they feel safe
- An environment in which religious faith and beliefs are respected
- An environment that celebrates and supports diversity and equality
- Access to a learning environment that will encourage them to think for themselves, to understand how decisions are made and how actions work to solve or create problems
- Access to an environment that values each pupil as an individual and equips them with the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to make a successful and rewarding contribution to their community in and out of school
- Access to an environment that supports their social, emotional and health well-being

Academy proposers will be expected to:

- Provide a sustainable good or outstanding school with an exciting and inspiring broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils.
- Maintain a rigorous focus on educational standards to ensure that every child and young person achieves their potential and goals, and National expectations are met or exceeded.
- Ensure an inclusive learning environment for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and that they are supported and enabled to make appropriate progress.
- Promote good pupil behaviour, and an ethos that fosters their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure, and away from harm.
- Seek out and share best practice within and beyond the school, promoting innovation and creativity in learning and teaching.
- Implement rigorous processes of self-evaluation and continual improvement, including recognising the importance of children and young people's voice in these processes.
- Ensuring pupils understand how to improve their learning as a result of frequent, detailed and accurate feedback from teachers following assessment of their learning.
- Ensure gaps in achievement for pupils from vulnerable groups are smaller than the national average and continuing to close.
- Attract, retain and develop the highest quality teachers and support staff to ensure good or better teaching and learning, and effective and motivated workforces.



Working in partnership

All Lancashire schools are encouraged to work in partnership within strong local collaboratives and/or teaching alliances led by national leaders in education.

A key component of selection will be the Academy Sponsors' willingness to work in collaboration with the relevant County Council services and other providers/partners to develop services which clearly demonstrate continual improvement, through the sharing of expertise and collaborative working.

Academy proposers will be expected to:

- Ensure the school plays a key role within its immediate community and the wider local economy.
- Engage all parents and carers in supporting their child's achievement, behaviour and safety, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Work in partnership with the County Council and other educational providers to contribute towards meeting a collective responsibility to secure the best for all Lancashire children and young people, fostering strong school to school relationships, and co-operating with Fair Access protocols.
- Develop strategic alliances, partnerships and networks based on a collective moral purpose to better meet the needs of children, young people and families in the Lancaster area.
- Fully engage with the school-to-school support, including peer-to-peer support, network/ cluster/partnership working, and the sharing of good practice.
- Support the statutory responsibilities of the County Council to ensure sufficiency of high-quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information.



Pupil voice

The academy sponsor will need to clarify how:

- the school will ensure pupils are supported to participate effectively in decisions about support available to them in their local area and in school
- Pupils will be involved in the planning and reviewing process of their support
- The school will ensure pupils have access to the information they need to make informed decisions.





Involving parents

LCC expects that potential Academy Sponsors will be able to determine their plans and arrangements for engaging parents and carers in supporting pupil's achievements and behaviour through engagement with parent support groups.

Accountability

The Council recognises that statutorily Academy sponsors are accountable through the Education and Skills Funding Agency to the Secretary of State. However, a statutory role for the Local Authority is supporting parents and families through promoting a good supply of strong schools to offer maximum choice and diversity.

This requires that Academy Sponsors are also accountable for their performance to parents, the local community, and to the Local Authority in our role as champions of educational excellence and for the safeguarding and support for vulnerable children and families.

The LA will expect as a minimum that:

- Sponsors will attend meetings with the Local Authority elected members and/or officers upon request to report on progress of the school.
- Sponsors will provide data as requested by the Local Authority to enable the performance of the school to be monitored.

The Local Authority will be able to attend any meeting established by the Academy Sponsor to monitor the performance of the school against any issue identified in an Ofsted inspection report.

Sponsors will respond quickly and positively to any safeguarding concerns raised by the Local Authority.





Lancashire
County
Council

