

# **Merton Council**

## **Cabinet**

**22 June 2021**

### **Supplementary Agenda**

10 Expansion of Melrose School into Whatley Avenue SW20

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## Cabinet

**Date: 22 June 2021**

Agenda item:

### **Subject: Expansion of Melrose School into Whatley Avenue SW20**

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Cabinet Member: Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Contact officer: Tom Procter, Head of Contracts and School Organisation

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#### **Recommendations:**

1. To publish statutory proposals to expand Melrose School by 80 additional places through the use of an additional site - Whatley Avenue SW20 and to extend the official designation of Melrose School from “Children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health” to “Children with additional complex and varied needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)”
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#### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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- 1.1 The report outlines the urgent need to provide additional special school places to meet the increase in children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) with EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) requiring a specialist placement, particularly for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- 1.2 There is an urgent need to provide more local, high quality and cost effective state school placements to address the significant deficit in the council's 'High Needs' Dedicated Schools Grant budget.
- 1.3 The report sets out why the expansion of Melrose School into Whatley Avenue SW20 is the most effective solution. It sets out the legal process for a statutory consultation for the expansion of Melrose School onto an additional site. This follows an informal consultation event with Kids First (the representative group in Merton for parents and carers of children with SEND)

#### **2. DETAILS**

##### **Need for additional SEND places**

- 1.1 There is an urgent need to provide significantly more special school places in Merton than provided through expansions to date, especially for children with ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder).

1.2 This is for the following reasons:

- Further significant increases in EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) and demand for specialist SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) places clarifies there is demand for more places than previously perceived
- National data based on SEN2 council returns confirms that Merton has a deficiency of state SEND places compared to comparative council areas and has almost the highest percentage of pupils with EHCPs in independent schools
- The council has a significant deficit in its 'High Needs' Dedicated Schools Grant budget, mostly due to the high cost of specialist school placements
- There is a particular need for more provision for children with ASD with slightly higher functioning than currently placed at Cricket Green School

1.3 The increase in EHCPs by provision type according to the council's SEN2 returns up to January 2021 is as follows:

	Jan 2016 Total Statements and EHCPs	Jan 2017 Total Statements and EHCPs	Jan 2018 Total Statements and EHCPs	Jan 2019 Total Statements and EHCPs	Jan 2020 Total Statements and EHCPs	Jan 2021 Total Statements and EHCPs
Early Years (inc. Private & Voluntary Settings)	0	1	7	7	7	8
Mainstream School (inc. Academies)	422	461	526	584	682	816
Additional Resourced Provision	110	111	116	125	125	133
State Funded Special School	358	388	416	440	474	520
Independent Schools	132	153	176	228	305	367
Post 16 College and traineeships	25	93	183	212	194	268
Post 16 Specialist	10	25	44	37	40	44
Alternative Educative	15	10	22	28	44	37
No placement (including NEET)	3	0	28	51	57	59
<b>Total</b>	<b>1075</b>	<b>1242</b>	<b>1518</b>	<b>1712</b>	<b>1928</b>	<b>2252</b>

PROPORTIONS BY PROVISION\*.

	Jan 2016 Total Statement s and EHCPs	Jan 2017 Total Statement s and EHCPs	Jan 2018 Total Statement s and EHCPs	Jan 2019 Total Statement s and EHCPs	Jan 2020 Total Statement s and EHCPs	Jan 2021 Total Statement s and EHCPs
Early Years (inc. Private & Voluntary Settings)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Mainstream School (inc. Academies)	39%	37%	35%	34%	35%	36%
ARP (Additional Resourced Provision)	10%	9%	8%	7%	6%	6%
State Funded Special School	33%	31%	27%	26%	25%	23%
Independent/Non-Maintained Provision (including	12%	12%	12%	13%	16%	16%
Post 16 College and traineeships	2%	7%	12%	12%	10%	12%
Post 16 Specialist	1%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Alternative Educative	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	2%
No placement (including NEET and hospital sch	0%	0%	2%	3%	3%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* Note these are impacted by the significant increases in post 16 placements due to the requirement to maintain an EHCP up to the age of 25 years. If this is taken out the proportion in mainstream school has remained steady to 2019 and has increased on the past 2 years, and the increased proportion in Independent schools is more marked.

- 1.4 Although expansion of our maintained special schools has facilitated an increase of 162 pupils on roll in these schools over the past five years, the proportion of placements in independent provision has increased significantly, almost a three-fold increase (from 132 to 367), partly due to state special school capacity issues. By far the highest increase is in children with ASD.
- 1.5 There is an urgent need to address as part of the council's strategy to provide good quality state school placements.

### **Site solution for additional provision**

- 1.6 Melrose school is on a relatively restricted site so expansion is required on an additional site. Having reviewed previous work on potential school sites and other existing Children, Schools and Families sites, the council has one clear option that would be suitable to provide specialist places for approximately 80-90 additional pupils. Whatley Avenue, SW20 (former Adult Education building used temporarily by Harris Academy Wimbledon up to November 2020) offers the most advantageous solution for the following reasons:
- It is available without complications
  - As a former school it requires more limited adaptation of less than £1 million rather than a new build of circa £8 million
  - Alternative buildings on green and brown field sites are not available or not as advantageous when the build and loss of opportunity to a capital receipt is considered.
  - It is a suitable size for a school/satellite site to meet need
  - Its location to the west of the borough is attractive to compete with Independent Schools

### **Operating the new provision**

- 1.7 The council's preference is to provide for an additional site for Melrose School rather than a new Free/Academy school for the following reasons:
- Melrose School is a "Good" school with outstanding features, and has the capacity to be outstanding – this practice could spread to the additional provision
  - Although it has the designation of an SEMH school, Melrose school is already providing for an increasing number of children with ASD and can meet the aim to offer GCSEs to pupils where appropriate
  - Melrose School is part of the wider Melbury College Federation and so has wide experience of working effectively with vulnerable children including with medical needs
  - It is increasingly apparent that considering children in terms of their primary need is not necessarily effective, and a school that meets a

spectrum of SEMH and ASD with the flexibility for children and staff to move across sites as needed would provide a highly effective model

- There are economies of scale in providing for new site provision as part of an existing school
- This is easily the quickest way to open provision to meet the urgent need; Free Schools in other council areas have taken many years to open

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 Additional places can be provided through the expansion of an existing school or by a new school. The council cannot open a maintained school but needs to facilitate a new school either through a provider who has successfully made an application to the DfE's Free School programme or through seeking an academy provider under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, which is known as the 'free school presumption'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption>.
- 3.2 Where proposals are invited under section 6A, the council would be responsible for providing the site for the new school and meeting all associated capital costs. The capital cost of Free Schools established under the DfE's free school programme are funded by the DfE
- 3.3 The section above outlines why it is recommended that Melrose School is expanded. The site is proposed following an options appraisal of available sites to the council outlined in Appendix 1 of this report.

### **4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1 Officers have consulted Melrose School and have the support of the Melrose School governors. A webinar was held with Kids First (the representative group in Merton for parents and carers of children with SEND) on 10 June 2021. Full notes are provided in appendix 2 to this report.
- 4.2 The webinar was attended by 17 people, parents extremely engaged and supportive and without any negative feedback. An example of a positive comment in the chat was *"I'm happy to see that there is this idea of planning provision for a blend between SMEH & ASD / other SEN needs that might fall outside of ARP but are not necessarily so specialist that they need to be sent to a private special school miles and miles away."* The keen interest in the proposal was demonstrated with nearly 50 questions answered by the council officer and the Executive Head of Melbury College. This included detailed questions on how the new provision would operate such as which GCSEs may be available, therapy provision, uniform policy, school trips, whether it would be a pathway for children currently in primary school resourced provision, and how entry to the school would work.

- 4.3 Should Cabinet agree the recommendation there will be a statutory notice process allowing representations from all interested parties prior to a Cabinet decision on the expansion.
- 4.4 As the building is already designated for education use a planning application is not expected to be required but there will be a leaflet drop of the immediate neighbours to inform them of this proposal. There has already been positive engagement with the leadership team at the adjacent Joseph Hood Primary School.

## **5. TIMETABLE**

- 5.1 The timetable following Cabinet decision is as follows:
- Statutory consultation 1 July to 28 July
  - Cabinet decision to approve expansion 6 September 2021
  - Implementation for September 2022 opening

## **6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

### **Capital**

- 6.1 The approved capital programme includes £1,020,000 for the proposed scheme, it is envisaged that this budget will be sufficient to undertake the required capital works.
- 6.2 To create sufficient playground space a temporary building will need to be demolished; as this will provide essential playground space it will be capitalised as part of the scheme,

### **Revenue**

- 6.3 The scheme is an important part of reducing the increasing costs from 2022/23 in the Dedicated School Grant High Needs block. Broadly the cost of providing a state-funded special school place for this banding of child is circa £25,000 per place compared to independent school placements at an average of circa £45,000 per place.

## **7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Council has a duty under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to secure that sufficient schools are available for its area to provide the opportunity of appropriate education for all pupils. It must exercise this function with a view to securing diversity in the provision of schools, and increasing opportunities for parental choice. In exercising this function, the council must have regard to the need for securing that special educational provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs. Where a child has an Education Health and Care Plan, under the Children and Families Act 2014, the council must secure the special educational provision specified in the plan, including arranging and meeting the cost of the appropriate school placement for the

child. These costs fall to the High Needs Block of the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant).

- 7.2 The permanent expansion of a maintained special school to increase the number of pupils by 10% or more than 20 pupils and a change in the type of special educational needs for which a maintained special school is organised to make provision are prescribed alterations for which statutory proposals must be published and approved under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.
- 7.3 The Regulations require that a summary notice of proposals is published in a local paper and on the council's website. Details of the proposals must be published on the council's website and copies provided on request. Copies of the proposals must be sent to the governing body of the school and parents of pupils. Comments on or objections to the proposals can be made within a 4 week period from publication of proposals.
- 7.4 The council is the decision maker for proposals. Approval can be conditional subject to certain events specified in the Regulations, including for instance the grant of planning permission. A decision must be made on the proposals within a period of two months of the end of the representation period or they must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.
- 7.5 Statutory guidance is published in 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools, statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers October 2018'  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/756572/Maintained\\_schools\\_prescribed\\_alterations\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756572/Maintained_schools_prescribed_alterations_guidance.pdf)
- 7.6 The guidance advises that "Although there is no longer a statutory 'pre-publication' consultation period for prescribed alteration changes, there is a strong expectation that schools and LAs will consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication, to take into account all relevant considerations."
- 7.7 The council as decision-maker must be satisfied that appropriate consultation and the representation period required by the Regulations has been undertaken and must consider all views submitted on the proposal.
- 7.8 The statutory guidance advises that decision-makers should consider the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area and whether the proposal will meet or affect the needs of parents, raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps. The council must consider the quality of new places created through expansion, taking account of a range of performance indicators and financial data, before deciding whether a school should be expanded. The DfE expects local authorities to create new places in schools that have an overall Ofsted rating of 'good' or 'outstanding'. The decision-maker must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Decision-makers must consider



community cohesion and should satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been properly taken into account and the proposed changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups.

- 7.9 The decision-maker should be satisfied that any necessary funding required to implement the proposal will be available.
- 7.10 The statutory guidance makes specific reference to expansions onto an additional site (or 'satellite sites') to ensure that the new provision is genuinely a change to an existing school and not in reality the establishment of a new school, and in these cases the proposal should be sent to the DfE at the time of publication. Decision makers will need to consider a non-exhaustive list of factors which are intended to expose the extent to which the new site is integrated with the existing site, and the extent to which it will serve the same community as the existing site. These are the following, with the more integration, the more likely the change will be considered as an expansion:

*The reasons for the expansion*

- What is the rationale for this approach and this particular site?

*Admission and curriculum arrangements*

- How will the new site be used (e.g. which age groups/pupils will it serve)?
- What will the admission arrangements be?
- Will there be movement of pupils between sites?

*Governance and administration*

- How will whole school activities be managed?
- Will staff be employed on contracts to work on both sites? How frequently will they do so?
- What governance, leadership and management arrangements will be put in place to oversee the new site (e.g. will the new site be governed by the same GB and the same school leadership team)?

*Physical characteristics of the school*

- How will facilities across the two sites be used (e.g. sharing of the facilities and resources available at the two sites, such as playing fields)?
- Is the new site in an area that is easily accessible to the community that the current school serves?

- 7.11 It is the view of officers that background to the proposals as set out in paragraph 1.7 above demonstrate that the proposals are genuine expansion proposals and not in reality proposals for a new school. It is also noted that Melrose already has some experience of ASD and already has pupils being prepared for GCSEs. The school can demonstrate that staff have specific relevant qualifications and training and there are therapies etc provided to support the needs specifically of pupils with ASD. The new site will serve the same community as the existing school which provides for pupils across Merton. Staff will transfer across the sites according to needs.

- 7.12 Special schools normally specialise in one of the four areas of special educational needs:
- communication and interaction
  - cognition and learning
  - social, emotional and mental health
  - sensory and physical needs
- 7.13 However, schools can further specialise within these categories to reflect the special needs they help with, for example Autistic spectrum disorders, visual impairment, or speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) Melrose is currently organised to provide for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Schools can specialise in more than one area of need. In deciding whether to approve the proposal to change the designation of the school, to include meeting the needs of children with additional complex and varied needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), the council should consider the factors set out in paragraph 7.8 above.
- 7.14 Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, if a local authority in England think a new school needs to be established in their area, they must seek proposals for the establishment of an Academy. If the Secretary of State or an objector considers that proposals for the expansion of Melrose are not a genuine expansion of the school, but in reality the establishment of a new school, the council could receive a complaint that it is in breach of its duty under section 6A. This may be enforced by judicial review, or the Secretary of State has power on a complaint or otherwise to issue a direction to a local authority if they have failed to discharge their education functions.

## **8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The expansion of Melrose School will contribute to the Authority providing access to a local SEND school place for all its residents with an eligible need for one. The proposal will assist the aim of ensuring that children with special educational needs will be able to attend suitable local school provision.

## **9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 None specific

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There is a small risk that the Secretary of State could view that the proposal is not a school expansion onto an additional site as per his published criteria. While legal advice is that this is not the case, the council would at least know

at an early stage and would have to consider the position at that point before the decision to expand the school is made.

10.2 The capital scheme will be developed to manage the financial risk. However, a capital scheme will always carry some risk of not meeting the budget.

**11. APPENDICES – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report**

- Appendix 1 – Site search for additional SEND school provision
- Appendix 2 – Notes of webinar with Kids' First

**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- None

## Appendix 1

**Note – land values provided by DVS (District Valuer Services) are confidential so have been blanked out for this report**

### **Site search for additional SEND school provision**

To meet demand, including addressing the issue that the council has one of the greatest number of children travelling outside the borough for SEND provision, the need for an extensive new provision has been identified.

A new 80 place SEND school on a green field site requires a minimum site of circa 3,000 m<sup>2</sup>. A new build would cost circa £8 million, requiring a build of at least 8 general classrooms, and extensive supplementary space.

#### **Previous site searches for school sites**

Extensive site searches have been undertaken over the past 8 years for new school sites, initially through two reports undertaken by Capita Symonds. Following a review of these reports and knowledge of officers in CSF and E&R departments on sites within the control of Merton Council, the following are potential options:

**Battle Close** – the site is of sufficient size and a good location. However the site has been identified for housing with DVS (District Valuer Services) value of [REDACTED] million as of 31 March 2019. It would require a new build at the cost of circa £8 million so the combined build and opportunity loss is over [REDACTED] million.

**Worsfold House** – the site is of sufficient size (circa 6,500m<sup>2</sup>) but as it is adjacent to Cricket Green School it would just be seen as making Cricket Green too large and even more special school places in Mitcham. It has been identified by the DVS as having a value of up to circa [REDACTED] million. Feasibility studies show it is not practical to adapt to be a school and so a new build at circa £8 million would still be required, so the combined build and opportunity loss is over [REDACTED] million

**Former Merton Adult Education, Whatley Avenue** – Site size 3,450m<sup>2</sup> GIA 2652 m<sup>2</sup>

Potential SEND pupil capacity 80-100 places

Present accommodation comprises:

- 18 classroom size spaces (some of which have been converted for specialist space for Harris Wimbledon)
- Gym of 174m<sup>2</sup>
- 2 Halls of 132m<sup>2</sup> (though both are limited due to being at the centre of a group of classrooms and a through-way)
- Kitchen, office and group rooms

- Based on 80% of classrooms being general and 20% specialist, and group sizes of 10 per classroom, the building could accommodate 140 SEND pupils i.e. 1FE for years 7-11 without any substantial work, but see note below.

The external space is relatively limited for the size of the building, and there is a narrow frontage that may make taxi and bus drop off challenging, and off site drop off e.g. use of Joseph Hood Recreation Ground would be required. One option to improve external space would be to demolish two of the classrooms that are single storey modular, thus reducing the potential SEND pupil capacity.

The former Merton Adult Education, Whatley Avenue became vacant in 2016/17 and was the temporary site for Harris Academy Wimbledon from September 2018 to November 2020. There is no firm plans for its use after this time. The cost of adaptations is relatively low, and estimated at less than £1 million

There is a potential value for residential, though it is not clear whether this could be realized for this site. The site allocation currently proposed in the draft local plan is “Residential once it has been proven that there is no demand for educational use at primary or secondary level.”

### **Chaucer Centre - Potential SEND pupil capacity 100 places**

The Chaucer Centre has a similar a GIFA to Whatley Avenue but the site is larger (6,300m<sup>2</sup>, 1.55 acres excluding parking area between SMART centre and Chaucer Centre). Based on the indicative DVS value of █████ million per acre for housing land in Mitcham and Morden this provides a value of █████ million.

It would require the Merton council staff training centre to close and lettings on first floor to be re-located.

The location is not as beneficial as currently all existing SEND schools are in Mitcham and Morden.

It also requires more adaptation than Whatley Avenue as it is not presently a school, though still relatively minimum as a former school. Based on an estimated adaptation cost of £2 million, the combined build and opportunity loss is █████ million.

### **50 Montgomery Close, Pollards Hill**

The only further site within the council’s ownership suggested by The Property Management and Review Manager is this former Children’s home converted by council, with a total GIFA over two floors of 610 m<sup>2</sup>. It is currently occupied by MOAT Housing but the lease of the first floor ends June 2022 and the lease of the ground floor has not been completed but is to end at the same date . If it were used Property Management and Review would consider that its revenue budgets should be compensated for the loss of income.

However, this would be considerably too small; it is 20% of the size of Whatley Avenue.

## **CSF occupied site options**

Given the priority for SEND places CSF has looked at its existing operational sites including schools, particularly as demand for primary school places is now reducing.

### **Schools with surplus places.**

The following Community primary schools have all agreed to reduce by 1 form of entry (FE) in reception year since 2017: Gorrington Park, Hillcross, Liberty, and Merton Abbey.

The following VA schools and Academies have done the same: Park, Sacred Heart RC, St Thomas of Canterbury RC, Stanford, Benedict and All Saints. Sacred Heart RC has moved back up to 2FE

Surplus space at Stanford Primary School is already providing a primary ASD base, opening in January 2020.

Some of the other schools above would potentially have 7 space classrooms available, but it would take approximately 4-5 years or more for these to be realised, and in many cases it would be challenging to have a distinct area that could be a provision operated by another provider, and especially to provide for secondary aged children on a primary school site.

All Saints CE has two separate sites with its Haydons Road having a Potential SEND pupil capacity of 50 places. However, it should be noted that this site is not within the control CSF department, or the council generally, and requires a negotiation with Southwark Diocese, who are presently not supportive as they wish the school to have demand to be full to 2-forms of entry. Unless temporary classrooms are provided it would be 6 years before the school building was fully emptied.

Generally there would probably be some resistance from schools giving up part of their site to another provision, especially as a building would be linked, and some of the above are VA schools or Academies so not within the council's control. Any approach as undertaken at Stanford to provide Additionally Resourced Provision within the schools (in addition to a new specialist SEND school site) appears more realistic.

### **Children's Centres, maintained Nursery Schools and Youth Centres**

Children's Centres and Youth Centres are relatively small buildings, and do not have existing suites of classroom sized spaces. The exception is **Lavender Nursery** (London Road) and has a potential SEND pupil capacity 40-50.

A decision would need to be made that the council is agreeable to closing a nursery used by many families. While this was seen as an option, given the greater demand for SEND places, it now seems shortsighted to provide for only 40-50 pupils.

### **Conclusion**

Whatley Avenue is the preferred site as:

- It is available without complications
- Its location to the west of the borough is attractive to compete with Independent Schools
- As a former school it requires more limited adaptation of less than £1 million rather than a new build of circa £8 million
- Section 5 estimates its value as ■■■ million. However, initial analysis from Future Merton is that it would be challenging to provide an intensive housing development due to the low-rise houses adjacent to the site – in fact it would be challenging to receive planning permission for residential buildings that had the same footprint and height as the present school building.
- It is a suitable size for a satellite school to meet need

## Appendix 2

### Webinar on 10 June 2021 regarding new SEND provision for Merton planned to open in September 2022

The webinar was arranged by Kids First upon the request of Merton Council to discuss its proposal for new SEND provision at Whatley Avenue SW20 (formerly Adult Education building adjacent to Joseph Hood Primary School) prior to council officers asking the council's Cabinet on 22 June to undertake a formal consultation on its proposal.

The webinar was introduced by Tracy Blackwell from Kids First (Merton Mencap) and presentations followed from Tom Procter, Head of Contracts and School Organisation at Merton Council and Carla Chandler, Executive Headteacher, Melbury College.

Tom Procter's Powerpoint presentation set out the need for more in-borough SEND school places with rising EHCPs and proportionally more places in independent schools, partly due to a lack of places, and the proposed location of the new provision in Whatley Avenue SW20, a school building used as an adult education centre for many years and most recently for two years by Harris Academy Wimbledon.

The provision was planned for secondary school age and potentially primary pupils aged 9-11 for children with additional complex and varied needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). It will offer a pathway for GCSEs so will provide for children with ASD with higher functioning than currently placed at Cricket Green or Perseid Schools.

It is not technically a new school but an expansion of Melrose School under the executive leadership of Carla Chandler, Executive Headteacher of Melbury College. The rationale for this was set out including that Melrose school is already providing for an increasing number of children with ASD, and the Melbury College Federation has wide experience of working effectively with vulnerable children including with medical needs.

Tom outlined the timetable: Subject to Merton Cabinet decision on 22 June there would be a 4 week statutory consultation in July, a decision would be made whether to proceed in September 2021, and the provision should open from September 2022.

Carla Chandler set out the work of Melbury College and how the new provision would effectively provide for children with ASD and SLCN.

The following questions were raised through the Q&A function and chat with answers provided by Carla and Tom as follows:

Question	Answer(s)/Follow up comments
Will children need to have an EHCP to attend?	Yes as it will be a special school. However, there may be children without an EHCP who are referred via the Melbury Federation umbrella and may be recommended for an EHCP and eventually apply for this provision.



Will there be different groups within a year, according to needs and ability? Will there be an ASD specific group? Do you mix children with SEMH and those without?	This is not planned at the moment but it could be a possibility. All will have ASD traits and needs so could target higher needs separately.
I fully recognise the need for provision for young people with autism in the borough. How will the LA address the issue of inclusivity for this group outside their school life, as they become less visible to their peer group.	The intention of the new provision is to avoid children travelling outside the borough and so be more inclusive than presently. Melbury currently offer a lot of support to pupils with clubs outside of school. We have a number of keyworkers who encourage and support out of school activities as well as life skills.
Will the school be suitable for children with ASD and overall moderate learning needs but potential to maybe take one or two GCSEs?	Yes and it will offer a bespoke provision and looked at on a one to one basis.
How will places be allocated? Do you foresee yourselves being over subscribed? Will 80 places be enough?	Places will be allocated as all SEN places through the SEN panel. Yes, we do see the school being popular and potentially oversubscribed. The 80 places was based on building capacity and we will need to review demand further.
Would a child in an independent provision be expected/encouraged to move to the new provision?	Not if they were settled in their current position. However, we may well find families in independent provision want to move to more local provision.
Will the school be like Cricket Green School in Mitcham? or is there another school in Merton that you can use as an example for how Whatley Avenue would be	It will be a special school with expertise in ASD but offer a different provision. There is no similar school in Merton at the moment to use an example but it will provide for a range of need, including providing children which are not suitable for mainstream school or resourced provision but can take a GCSE pathway
What is the general idea for class size/numbers, age range etc? I.e. classes based on age OR academic ability OR needs provision OR number of pupils? Or would all that be decided based on EHCP applications?	Approximately 10 children, up to 15 for higher functioning pupils. Will keep in year groups but if there are two Year 7 classes one could be for higher functioning pupils. Class sizes will be based on EHCPs and tailored to their individual needs.
What is the youngest age of a child that can attend?	Year 4 or Year 5 would be the youngest – before this age range we expect the child would be in mainstream primary or an ARP (Additionally Resourced Provision) or potentially if SEMH we now have Melrose Primary School to offer.
If a child is in a mainstream primary school with an EHCP - can they apply to Whatley Avenue as per the usual school application process?	They would apply through the SEN process rather than through general school admissions.

And at what age would the child leave?	At the end of Year 11. Melbury do not offer a Sixth form option at the moment and none is proposed at the moment but it could be considered in the future for this provision.
Will children get taught all subjects in one classroom or transition to different rooms for different subjects?	Aware that these pupils needs and that structure is important for them, but planning to have specialist classrooms for some specialist subjects.
What proportion of females to males are you expecting?	School will be co-educational and based on need; it is difficult to predict the proportions though nationally special educational needs remains more prevalent in boys than girls
Would you be part of the ARP (Additionally Resourced Provision) panel that meet to consider ECHP schools needs as part of Merton?	It is expected that this school could be a pathway for children presently in a primary school ARP. This would be considered as part of transitions planning.
If they were in a secondary school ARP could they move to Whatley Avenue?	Potentially this could be the case but through the SEN process but would need to understand need and the suitability of the current placement Vs proposed.
Parents with children in year 5 have to name their choices for secondary school for September 2022 now. How will this work with timescales for the new provision?	Placement planning for the following year normally starts in the autumn term – the aim is for the proposal to be agreed in September to fit in with this timescale for September 2022.
Thanks. Would distance go in a child's favour?	Distance is not generally a factor with pupils with an EHCP, but based on needs. But we would want to offer to as many Merton children as possible to reduce their travelling time, and it will be of benefit to families that Merton will have provision in the west of the borough for the first time
Does OCD come under the heading of SEMH?	Obsessive compulsive disorder is generally considered as part of wider EHCP needs.
How have ASD ARPs been involved in the planning process? Will the pupils have more complex needs than those at ARPs?	Not in detail yet but there will be close working. We are aiming to complement the ARP provision at Raynes Park High School and other existing special school settings. This provision is for when it is not suitable for a child to spend any time in mainstream class lessons.
Will there be a uniform?	Yes but it is quite simple. Understand that some pupils may not like this but a uniform gives a sense of belonging. However this could be reviewed as part of the consultation process.
Will the school accommodate Sensory Processing Difficulties (SPD)?	Yes but an individual placement decision would be part of the EHCP process.

Do you know what time the school day will end?	This has not been decided yet but probably between 3 and 3.30pm. We are liaising with Joseph Hood Primary School regarding this as they are adjacent to the building and we will need to manage traffic flow etc outside the building.
Will there be school trips?	Yes, we have experience of this from Melrose where we do lots of them including DofE bronze award trips, and they will be about needs and support. We currently have social development opportunities at Melrose tailored to individual pupils and encourage resilience and confidence outside of school.
Will foreign languages be offered?	We could consider this if there was the demand. However they would be an option and not compulsory.
What will the therapy provision be? Do you think you will be able to recruit therapists as this is already quite difficult?	We will have sensory rooms, nurture gardens, break-out rooms etc. We are aware of the problem of therapist recruitment but are confident we would be able to recruit them. Melrose already has some therapists working with the school
How will you provide Social Skills Groups. Will this be via ELSA?	Yes, we currently have 10 ELSA (Emotional literacy support assistants) trained staff and teach a large range of social skills. Each pupil also has their own mentor.
Will all staff have ASD specialist training?	We already have a number of specialist ASD trained staff and will be recruiting more for this provision.
What form will the consultation take - how will local schools be involved? When will the decision be made?	The proposal will go to Cabinet on 22 June. If approved there will be a four week statutory consultation period from late June to late July which will provide an opportunity for written comments and objections. All schools will be invited to respond. We are interested in the views of local communities and parents for the best provision for these children. Final decision will be made at the September Cabinet meeting.
Is there an ASD specialist provision planned at Cricket Green? Thought there was talk of that some time ago.	Cricket Green already includes an ASD provision and has undergone expansion over the last few years. We are looking at a different aspect of ASD.
How will we know if it's going ahead?	It will be on our website and we can also publicise it through Kids First/Merton Mencap.

Does it need local neighbourhood approval?	It doesn't need change of use planning permission as it is already a designated school. We may need to make a small planning application for alterations to the front/entrance and will also leaflet the neighbours to keep them informed
Are Joseph Hood on board with it?	Yes – we have had discussion with the Headteacher as it will be important to ensure access to our sites are managed well. There is also an opportunity to share resources etc.
Is there any danger that the planning committee might have an issue with additional transport arrivals/departures?	The building was recently used as a temporary school for 300 Harris Academy Wimbledon pupils which is far less than the number we are planning for. However we are mindful of any transport issues and to reduce this we are proposing a drop-off point in Joseph Hood Rec as well as in front of the school.
How many pupils would you take in the initial intake in September 2022 and would that just be to Year 7 or into multiple years?	We will not be opening with the full 80 capacity but are likely to open for more than just year 7, depending on need.
What range of GCSE's do you plan to offer? Will it just be English, Maths and Science or the full range, perhaps delivered in partnership with another local school if needed? If a child is academically capable, can they take 8-9 GCSEs?	We will be offering a range of GCSEs and vocational courses. Our current offer includes English Language, English Literature, Maths, Double Science, DT, Art, Music, History, Computing, DofE bronze award and AQAs plus with have links with outside vocational skills providers such as SILK and R2S.
What will be the approach to physical education classes?	The building has a large hall/gym which we will make use and we will offer PE as a GCSE option as well as BTEC dance.
Will there be any after school provision?	We don't have any provision at our other sites at the moment and haven't considered it yet, but we could do.
Comment: I'm happy to see that there is this idea of planning provision for a blend between SMEH & ASD / other SEN needs that might fall outside of ARP but are not necessarily so specialist that they need to be sent to a private special school miles and miles away.	
Comment: Thanks. Great sounding provision. Much needed.	



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