

## **Improving provision in Leeds to meet complex social, emotional and mental health needs: closure of the provision for these needs at the Oakwood Lane site of the West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College: SEN Improvement test**

Leeds City Council is re-designing our local offer of specialist education provision for children and young people with complex social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs (formerly known as 'behavioural, emotional and social difficulties', or 'BESD').

We aim to radically improve the quality, range and flexibility of our current provision, developing world-class education in Leeds for this vulnerable group of learners and providing more places to support our growing population.

Developments are already underway to improve provision in Leeds for secondary aged learners with SEMH needs. The current offer consists of 3 different provisions for 11-16 year olds, each under different leadership. They are based in buildings which are old and not high quality. We are bringing these provisions together into a single, unified provision with an extended age range of 10-19. This new provision will be located on different sites but led by one academy, the Wellspring Academy Trust, recognised for their outstanding provision for learners with SEMH needs. This will provide a more 'joined-up' approach and more flexibility about which site the learners can access. Sites will include a new building and refurbished buildings, designed specifically for SEMH needs, to improve accommodation.

The developments to provision for 10-19 year olds as above have already been agreed. We are now consulting on a proposal to also bring the current SEMH provision at the Oakwood Lane site of the West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College into the new single, unified 'through-school' provision under the Wellspring Academy Trust.

This would mean that the West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College would cease to provide for SEMH needs at their Oakwood Lane site from 1 September 2016. Instead the provision, staying on the same site, would become part of the new academy provision and run by the Wellspring Academy Trust.

The new academy provision led by Wellspring would become a single 'through school' offering flexible provision across different sites for the full age range from 4 -19.

This would create greater flexibility for learners who need to transition from one provision to another. In our current model, as all the provisions are run separately, transition from one site to another is not as timely and efficient as it could be. Having just one leadership and governance would make transition much smoother.

It would also mean greater flexibility about when a learner can move on to 'secondary' provision. In our current model, age ranges are fixed at 4-11 for 'primary' provision and 11-16 for 'secondary' provision. Our new model proposes to create one 'through-school' provision for all learners aged from 4-19, and to allow children aged 10 years to move into 'secondary' provision on other sites if this better suits their needs. This will allow for a more personalised approach to meeting individual needs.

Currently the range of provision to meet different complex SEMH needs in Leeds is limited. As a result, some children and young people have to access provision outside of Leeds. This can mean travelling a long way and is unfair, as other learners in Leeds do not have to do this. It is also not good value for money. Working with the Wellspring Academy, who have a great deal of experience on this area, and increasing the flexibility on transition of pupils from one provision to another, will allow us to better meet individual needs and support learners here in Leeds.

The governors at the West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College accept that there are demonstrable benefits to providing one clear 'continuum' of provision in the city which will provide children and young people with SEMH needs a clear pathway of progression through primary and secondary provision. The governors have therefore indicated their full support for the changes.

**For more detailed information about these proposals** or to request a copy of the consultation booklet that you can use to give your views on these proposals, please email the Capacity Planning and Sufficiency Team: [educ.school.organisation@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:educ.school.organisation@leeds.gov.uk)

For more detailed information regarding SEMH provision, please contact the complex needs service's best practice team via [bpTEAM@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:bpTEAM@leeds.gov.uk), marking your email 'SEMH proposals'.

Any local authority (Council) who wants to make changes to schools providing places for children and young people with any kind special educational need (SEN) or disability, including SEMH needs, is required by the Department for Education (DfE) to show that the proposed changes meet the requirements of the 'SEN Improvement Test'.

The requirements of the test are as follows:

- Improved access to education including the curriculum, wider school activities, facilities and equipment, with reference to the local authority's Accessibility Strategy
- Improved access to specialist staff, both education and other professionals, including external support and outreach services
- Improved access to suitable accommodation
- Improved supply of suitable places

This document sets out how the proposal to improve our offer of SEMH specialist education provision meets these requirements.

The local authority proposing to make changes is also required to provide:

- Confirmation from the host school that they are willing to receive pupils with communication and interaction needs
- Confirmation of specific transport arrangements
- Confirmation of how the proposals will be funded and the planning staffing arrangements put in place

This document also provides those confirmations.

## **Requirements of the SEN improvement test and how the proposals above meet them:**

- Improved access to education including the curriculum, wider school activities, facilities and equipment, with reference to the local authority's Accessibility Strategy

The current SEMH provision is rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted. The proposed development of a unified, multi-site provision for SEMH needs, including those pupils whose needs have been met at West Oaks to date, would be led by an academy noted for their outstanding provision and excellence in supporting SEMH needs, the Wellspring Academy Trust. We can be confident of maintaining the current high standards of practice regarding teaching and learning, wider school activities, and facilities.

Our proposed developments would also allow us to strengthen arrangements for pupils who need to make a transition from one SEMH provision to another, including pupils at the West Oaks provision. In our current model, as each provision has separate leadership and governance and operational arrangements, it can be difficult and time-consuming for pupils to transfer to another provision if it is decided that would better met their needs. By having all the provision unified under one leadership, we can avoid these issues.

Our new provision will also have greater flexibility on the age at which pupils might access 'secondary-aged' provision. Currently the provisions have fixed age ranges of 4 -11 and 11-16. However some pupils aged 10 may have their needs better met in a 'secondary' environment. Our new provisions will allow for pupils aged 10 at the provision currently run by West Oaks to make the transition earlier if this better meets their individual needs. The whole offer of provision will also extend to 19 years.

Our Access Strategy in Leeds states:

'All children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families are entitled to equal access to services which do not discriminate on the grounds of religion, ethnic origin, linguistic background, culture, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

Where services are offered, access to services, provision and inclusion may be an issue. Therefore the following considerations may be given.

- A workforce representative of the community it serves.
- Avoiding physical features that make it difficult for people with a disability and making reasonable adjustments to improve the environment.
- Improving access to information, premises, safe environment, transport and communication.
- A focus on inclusive practice and removing barriers to learning.

The Wellspring Academy Trust is fully committed to these principles and models them in their existing provisions.

The purpose of this provision is to enable access to learning for children and young people whose SEMH needs have been a considerable barrier to learning to date. Our academy

sponsor has a record of excellent practice in supporting children and young people with these needs to access learning.

- Improved access to specialist staff, both education and other professionals, including external support and outreach services

If this proposal is approved, then staff currently working at the Oakwood Lane Site would become employees of The Wellspring Academy Trust, at the point when the academy conversion takes place. A formal consultation regarding TUPE arrangements would also take place at a later date, which will involve all staff affected and will include trade union representatives.

The new unified provision will benefit from support from the city's Educational Psychologist team and SEN and Inclusion team. It will also be part of a new 'cluster' of special schools in the city, who will support each other and have access to support from targeted services including family support, an emotional health and well-being lead, and guidance and support for staff seeking additional support for families.

- Improved access to suitable accommodation

The current buildings at Oakwood Lane require some renovation works. Regardless of the outcomes of this consultation, works will be undertaken to improve the building. This will improve access to suitable accommodation. During these works, learners will be supported as an interim arrangement at a nearby site which will be carefully assessed to make sure it meets their needs. This will improve access to suitable accommodation regardless of the outcomes of consultation.

Our planned developments to secondary age provisions include one new building and two existing buildings that will be significantly renovated. It is likely that many of the learners at West Oaks SEN Specialist School and College currently accessing the provision at the Oakwood Lane site, will continue to need specialist support as they grow up and move into secondary education. These developments will assure them improved access to suitable accommodation at that point of transitioning to secondary education.

- Improved supply of suitable places

For the provision at Oakwood Lane, in the proposed model, some learners at age 10 would be access the 'secondary aged' provisions. This would release more places to be available at this site for younger pupils.

- Confirmations from the host schools that they are willing to receive pupils with communication and interaction needs:

The Wellspring Academy Trust are fully committed to ensuring they provide the best provision and support for pupils with communication and interaction needs.

Confirmation of specific transport arrangements:

The usual transport policy of Leeds City Council would apply for any children or young people accessing extra places in specialist education. You can find full details at <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/residents/Pages/Childrenstransport.aspx>

Confirmation of how the proposals will be funded and the planned staffing arrangements put in place:

In November 2015 the Council's Executive Board committed to securing and investing £45 million of capital funding in a world class provision to meet SEMH needs in Leeds.

Currently substantial funding – projected to be over £3million in 2015 – is spent each year on placing Leeds children and young people with SEMH needs in provisions outside of Leeds, as their complex needs cannot be met by the limited provision we have at present. By developing a higher quality, more diverse provision, we can recoup this funding and avoid the significant costs of travel also incurred.