

# Autism Support Centres

**Consultation on establishing an Enhanced provision for children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions from September 2016 at Merrylands Primary School, Cumberland Drive, Laindon, Basildon, SS15 6QS.**

February/ March 2016





## Introduction

The Local Authority has a critical role as champion for vulnerable children and young people in its area. It will ensure that disabled children and those with special or additional educational needs can access high-quality provision that meets their needs as near to their local community as possible.

The strategic direction is to maintain and develop special school provision in Essex and to seek to increase specialist provision proportionally across the county in response to predicted demand. An integral part of the Essex Local Offer is to ensure Essex has a continuum of provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties (SEMH). To deliver the strategic objectives in the SEN Strategy the LA is seeking to establish enhanced provision in some mainstream schools and designated specialist provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions and to ensure Essex has a continuum of alternative educational provision for young people with additional educational needs.

In Essex, a gap in educational provision has been identified for those children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions who require access to a mainstream curriculum, and have the ability to access a mainstream curriculum but are highly anxious and would benefit from even more specialised support than is normally available in such a setting. It is hypothesised that many of these children are currently attending Complex Needs Special Schools or out of authority special schools. One hypothesis is that a contributing factor has been a lack of parental confidence that their needs will be met adequately in a mainstream school for those children, who have high levels of anxiety and would normally find mainstream school overwhelming.

The Local Authority is consulting on developing a small number of Autism Support Centres (ASCs) attached to mainstream schools.

*This consultation proposes to establish an eight place ASC for primary aged pupils at Merrylands Primary School in Laindon.*

The Local Authority will also be proposing to establish a fifteen place ASC for secondary aged pupils within South Essex. A separate consultation will be undertaken in respect to the secondary provision, but the two proposals are co-dependant upon each other meaning that this primary provision proposal will only proceed if there is also agreement to proceed with the secondary provision proposal.

It is important to hear the views of all those with an interest in the school during this consultation period. Please read this document and let us have your comments by 21 March 2016. You may reply electronically at <http://tinyurl.com/Merrylands-feedback-form>

You can also write separately to the address provided on the form, or email to [school.organisation@essex.gov.uk](mailto:school.organisation@essex.gov.uk)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Gooding', written in a cursive style.

**Councillor Ray Gooding**

Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

## **Dear Parents/ Carers, Staff and interested persons**

This consultation document contains important information about proposals by Essex County Council (ECC) to:

Establish an eight place Autism Support Centre attached to Merrylands Primary School in Laindon from September 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.

### **Background**

There has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, both nationally and in Essex. The increase can be explained by wider criteria for diagnosis and improved awareness. One study suggested that currently up to one in every hundred children may merit such a diagnosis at some point in their lives (Baird et al, 2006). The demand for specialist provision to meet the needs of these children is high and increasing.

Every Local Authority needs to provide educational provision to meet the full range of needs of children and young people with an Autism Support Condition diagnosis across the full age range from 0 to 19 years. In Essex there is a range of provision available, from Good Beginnings and pre-school specialist teachers in the early years to the specialist teacher team for Autistic Spectrum Conditions and Asperger syndrome and Good Futures (Autism Support Workers) support for children up to Year 7 in mainstream schools. In addition some children with statements/ Education Health and Care Plans of special educational needs attend Essex special schools and a small number are educated in out county provision both on a day and residential basis.

Essex has successfully established the first two Autism Support Centres in Harlow from September 2015 and is seeking to establish a further six from September 2016 to ensure parity of provision across the four quadrants of Essex. The January 2015 census showed that there were 2,035 children and young people with a statement for which the primary need was Autistic Spectrum Conditions. Of these, 1,066 were of primary age and 969 were of secondary age (to year 14). 1,378 students were educated in mainstream schools, academies or out of school, 498 in Essex Special schools and 159 were educated at either independent schools or schools in other Local Authorities.

### **Vision and Ethos for Learners and the Community**

Children based in an ASC will be included in the mainstream school. They will receive additional help from experienced and qualified professionals to assist their access to mainstream schools where they may otherwise struggle and potentially fail.

The overall aim of the ASC provision is to impact positively upon learning outcomes for pupils. The vision is for all children and young people diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Conditions to be healthy, happy and safe, do well in their education and are successful in their lives. This vision is derived from the vision outlined in Essex County Council's Special Educational Needs policy.

Effective support of children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions can pose significant challenges if these pupils are to be included socially and in accessing the curriculum appropriately. One aim of the present initiative is to develop a provision which will enable pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions to successfully access a mainstream curriculum with support.

The pupils referred to the Autism Support Centre:

- will be of the appropriate age for the setting;
- will have complex and additional needs in particular areas on the banding descriptors for autism;
- will be intellectually able to access the mainstream school curriculum ;
- will be able to access the inclusive provisions offered;
- Parents/carers have expressed a desire for mainstream education for their child and have visited the provision and expressed their commitment to working with them to ensure the success of the placement;
- School and Statutory Assessment Service have worked together to agree the suitability of the placement in line with current practice.

### **Benefits of the proposal**

Pupils with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Conditions who maybe anxious and have social communication difficulties will be able to attend mainstream school and access a mainstream curriculum with specialist support to help manage their Autism.

The ASCs will employ specialist staff and receive additional support from a local ASC Hub special school, providing considerable expertise in educating young people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions.

The aim of the ASC will be to provide facilities to allow more pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions access to mainstream schooling in Essex. Placing pupils in out-of-county provision sets them apart from their peers and is a huge drain on resources. Sensitively supported inclusion in a mainstream school is an essential step towards a child being able to develop strategies for life. For pupils who currently attend an out of authority school, the proposal will enable them to remain closer to their own community.

### **What would the admission and transport arrangements be in both the short and longer term?**

Admission to the ASC will be triggered when that provision is named in the pupil's Education Health and Care Plan. The Planned Admissions Number at Merrylands Primary will remain at 60. There will be an intended maximum of two pupils admitted to the ASC in any one year group up to a maximum number of eight pupils in the centre. Transport arrangements will be in accordance with the Local Authority's published policy on transport to mainstream enhanced provisions.

## **Why are we consulting the Community?**

We want to hear the views of the community before making a final decision on this proposal.

A complementary consultation will also be undertaken to establish an ASC for secondary aged pupils within South Essex. The two proposals are co-dependent in that the Local Authority is seeking to establish a continuum of provision for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions in South Essex and therefore needs to establish provision for both primary and secondary aged pupils.

## **How can you make your views known?**

The consultation period on a proposal to establish an eight place ASC at Merrylands Primary School in Laindon commences on 22nd February 2016 and ends on 21st March 2016. Parents, staff and members of the local community are encouraged to ask questions and express their views on the proposal. Meetings have been arranged for staff and children at the school. A drop-in session has also been arranged at the school on 4th March 2016 for parents and other interested parties who would like to find out more about the proposal from County Council Officers. At this stage no decision has been made, and all views received will be considered prior to a decision being taken as to whether to go ahead with the proposal.

In addition, you may wish to write to the County Council with your comments. This will assist the County Council, and the governing body, in reaching a clear understanding of the views of the community. You may use the form attached or write separately to the address provided overleaf, or email [school.organisation@essex.gov.uk](mailto:school.organisation@essex.gov.uk). You may also respond electronically by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/Merrylands-feedback-form>

Essex County Council handles information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998 and is the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. Your answers to this consultation will only be used to assess the community's view of the proposed enlargement and not for any other purpose. We will not give information about you to anyone outside Essex County Council.

If you have any questions about the consultation process or the proposal you can call Gary Bloom, Manager SEN Planning and Provision Development, on 03330 131154, or alternatively contact either the Headteacher or the Chair of Governors, via the school.

## **What happens next?**

At the end of this consultation period the Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning will consider the feedback and views expressed by all interested parties during the consultation and will make a decision on the proposal. If a decision is made to proceed, a Statutory Notice will be published in the local press and will be displayed at the main entrance to the school and at other conspicuous places in the area served by the school for a four week period. This four week representation period provides the final opportunity for people and organisations to comment on, or submit objections to, the proposal.

At the end of the four week period any comments on or objections to the proposal will be considered by the County Council and a final decision will be made on the proposal.

**Timescale**

The consultation period will run between 22nd February and 21 March 2016. A drop in session has been arranged for parents and other interested parties during this period, where officers from Essex County Council will be available to answer questions and listen to your views on the proposal.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
22 February 2016	Consultation document distributed
15 March 2016	Drop in session held for parents and the local community at the school, from 3pm until 7pm
21 March 2016	End of consultation period
April 2016	Publication of statutory notice
May 2016	End of period for representations
June 2016	Decision on proposal made by Essex County Council

\*These stages only apply if the proposal is approved by Essex County Council.



**RESPONSE FORM**

PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN 8 PLACE AUTISM SUPPORT CENTRE (ASC) AT MERRYLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL IN LAINDON FROM SEPTEMBER 2016, OR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THEREAFTER.

Please respond to the question below and add comments if you wish. You can do this electronically at <http://tinyurl.com/Merrylands-feedback-form> or by using the form below (attaching additional sheets as necessary).

Please indicate below whether or not you support the proposal

I support the proposal to establish an 8 place ASC at Merrylands Primary School, Laindon from September 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter.	
I do not support the proposal to establish an 8 place ASC at Merrylands Primary School, Laindon from September 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter.	

Please provide any supporting information for your preference above.

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Name: .....

Interest group: .....  
(e.g. parent, teacher, member of the local community)

Please return this form by insert date to: Essex County Council, School Organisation Team, PO Box 4261, Chelmsford, CM1 1GS, or hand in at your child’s school (who will to pass it on to the County Council).

Alternatively, email [school.organisation@essex.gov.uk](mailto:school.organisation@essex.gov.uk) to make your views known.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSE**