

Special Educational Needs Education in Rayleigh

Consultation on a proposal to establish a new SLD (Severe Learning Difficulties) Special Educational Needs School on the Wolsey Park development, Rayleigh, from Spring 2026.

February – April 2024



Essex County Council

Introduction

Essex County Council (ECC) has a statutory duty to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of school places for every child in Essex who requires one. Whilst there is no requirement to have special schools or specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the majority of local authorities do have special schools and specialist provisions.

The following pressures have driven the requirement for investment in new places in Essex, both through the development of new schools and through the expansion of existing schools:

- A consistently high number of pupils with SEND cannot have their needs met in Essex schools and are subsequently educated in independent schools at high cost to both the High Needs Block of the Essex Dedicated Schools Grant and ECC budgets.
- The number of children and young people in Essex special schools have grown consistently since the SEND reforms of 2015 and have placed severe pressure on capacity as a consequence.
- Mainstream schools in Essex do educate a higher percentage of pupils with an Education Health Care Plan but many pupils with higher needs are currently being kept in provision which is not appropriate to their needs.
- The requirement to place pupils and parents/carers at the heart of planning and provision for SEND.

Our strategic direction is to maintain and develop special school provision in Essex and to seek to increase specialist provision proportionally across the four quadrants of Essex in response to forecast need.

As in many areas of the county and the country, there is predicted to be significant pressure on special school places in Rochford over the next few years. Whilst meeting the demand for additional SEN school places has been made harder by the restraints on public expenditure, providing new school places remains a high priority.

Through this consultation we are seeking views on a proposal for a new special school on the Wolsey Park development in Rayleigh, Rochford to open in Spring 2026. We are proposing that the new school will be a 100-place special school, catering for children and young people with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD).

It is vital that we commission more special school places in this area of Rochford, and I invite you to let me have your views on this proposal so that these can be considered when a final decision is made later in the year.



Clare Kershaw
Director, Education

Background

Rochford has experienced a significant rise in the need for special school places in recent years as a result of a growing local population. There is predicted to be continued pressure on special school places in the coming years, mainly as a result of planned housing developments and inward migration across areas of the town. The Wolsey Park housing development, which will continue to progress for a number of years, will increase demand for school places in this area of Rochford significantly.

Pupil Forecasts and Deficit of Primary Places

Essex County Council (ECC) has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places for children living in the county. In order to do this, we monitor birth rates, new housing developments and parental preference for special schools compared to mainstream schools for children and young people with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). This information is used to forecast pupil numbers and to ensure there are sufficient school places.

The latest forecasts of pupil numbers indicate that there will be a sustained need for additional special school places in the Rochford district as a result of new housing, inward migration and a current deficit of specialist provision across South Essex.

The following table shows the forecast increase in the number of children and young people with an EHCP resident to Rochford up to 2027:

<u>Rochford Resident EHCPs by Provision</u>								
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
Enhanced Provision	12	9	11	16	13	11	12	13
Independent	19	15	17	18	19	29	33	34
Mainstream	235	264	283	311	324	321	330	355
Other	4	9	13	13	7	18	17	18
Post 16	58	98	108	98	100	102	98	78
PRU	7	3	8	5	6	7	7	8
Special	162	168	182	181	191	200	204	218
Total	497	566	622	642	660	688	701	724

There is currently no special school provision in Rochford and subsequently children and young people requiring a place have to travel outside of the district as illustrated below:

The table below shows the number of Rochford resident children attending special schools by the following distance thresholds

Distance between home and special school	Number of CYP with an EHCP in special schools	%
<5 miles	90	54%
Bet 5-9 miles	58	35%
Bet 10-19 miles	11	7%
20 miles and over	7	4%
	166	100%

The Way Forward

New 100 place special school, on the Wolsey Park development, Rochford

A new SLD school, which will be an academy as required by Government legislation, is proposed to be established on the Wolsey Park development from Spring 2026. The new school would be a 100 place SLD school catering for children with severe learning difficulties, aged 3-19. It is anticipated that the school would grow to full capacity over three years with a number to admit of 35 in each of the first two years.

A need was identified to increase the SLD school place capacity in the Rochford area due largely to the growing number of pupils with SLD in mainstream schools, the limitations on expanding other SLD schools in South Essex and various options were considered.

A new SLD school on the Wolsey Park site, as opposed to expansion of other existing schools, would more directly accommodate the increasing demand for SLD school places for pupils residing in and around this area where there has been significant population growth and an increased need for SLD provision.

ECC is required to consult with the community about the need for the school, and this is the consultation which we are undertaking now. ECC's Cabinet must then take a formal decision to run a process inviting applications from potential sponsors to run the new school. ECC will then make a recommendation to the Regional Director about a preferred sponsor, who will then, on behalf of the Secretary of State, decide which sponsor will run the new school. A draft timetable for these processes is at page 7.

A specification inviting proposals to sponsor the new school to accommodate the need for additional local places will be published in accordance with DfE requirements, subject to the outcome of this consultation. The County Council will commission the construction of the new school, and a map showing the location for the proposed school is on page 8.

Once appointed by the Secretary of State, the sponsor of the academy will undertake consultations with the local community that the school will serve.

Admissions

Admissions will only be made for children and young people with an Education, Health & Care Plan and following ECC consultation with the school. The LA will make the final decision regarding the placement, taking into account the school's views and capacity and will then make the necessary arrangements.

Transport Arrangements

Transport arrangements would remain in line with ECC's home to school transport policies.

Planning for the New School Building

Initial work is being undertaken to explore building options for the new school. A full feasibility study including highways and access considerations will be subject to consultation with the community during the detailed planning stage for the new school buildings. At present there are no drawings to share with the community. This consultation is just concerned with the need for the school and how the demand for school places in the Rochford area can be met.

The new special school will be built to high quality standards which meet the accommodation schedule set by the Department of Education for special schools. The classrooms, shared spaces (such as dining hall) and office areas will all be designed to make the best use of space.

The building will aim to be a 'net zero carbon in operation' design and will be energy efficient and look to achieve all power from on-site renewable energy sources such as solar panels which generate electricity. Therefore, the school's energy bills should be significantly reduced, as the building will not rely on gas or oil for energy.

The new SLD school proposal focuses on a number of ECC's key commitments including delivering **infrastructure** to support new homes and communities; achieving **net-zero**, through buildings that will have a net-zero carbon operational design; supporting active travel as part of the **built environment** of a sustainable, healthy neighbourhood; supporting high quality **education outcomes** with facilities that ensure children are able to learn and teachers able to teach in the most conducive environment.

Funding

The new school will be funded partly from contributions made by the housing developers known as section 106 contributions and partly from basic need funding from ECC.

How Can You Make Your Views Known?

The County Council is seeking the views of all interested persons about the proposal to establish a new SLD school on the Wolsey Park development. Comments can be sent via the electronic survey form (details below) or for those who wish to discuss the proposals in more detail, remote meetings can be arranged.

Time slots to provide an opportunity for parents and members of the local community to ask questions and comment on the proposal by telephone appointments are available to be booked in advance only and will be available between 2-4pm and again between 5-7pm on Wednesday 20 March 2024. Please email senstrategy@essex.gov.uk to book an appointment.

At this stage no decision has been made on the proposal and all the views received will be considered prior to a decision being taken as to whether to go ahead with the proposal. Final decisions will be taken in the context of the significant and growing need for more SLD school places in this area of Rochford.

Your Comments

You are invited to respond to this consultation using the following electronic survey form by Friday 5 April 2024:

<https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/school-organisation/wolseypark>

Alternatively, you may wish to write to or email us with your comments to the addresses given below by 5 April 2024.

Ralph Holloway – Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation

senstrategy@essex.gov.uk

SEND Strategy and Innovation

County Hall – E3

Market Road

Chelmsford CM1 1QH

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 proposal and not for any other purpose. We will not give information about you to anyone outside ECC.

If you have any questions about the consultation process or the new school proposal please contact Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation via email:

senstrategy@essex.gov.uk

The information contained in this document can be made available in alternative formats: large print, Braille, audio tape or disk and can be translated on request. Please email senstrategy@essex.gov.uk

What happens next?

At the end of this consultation period the Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Lifelong Learning and Employability and ECC's Cabinet will consider the feedback and views expressed by all interested parties during the consultation and will make a decision on the new SLD school proposal.

If a decision is made to proceed with the new SLD school, a specification inviting proposals to sponsor the new school will then be published.

Timeline

The consultation period will run from Friday 23 February to Friday 5 April 2024. Below is the anticipated timeline for the decision-making process:

Date	Activity
Friday 23 rd February 2024	Consultation commences
Wednesday 20 th March 2024 2-4pm and 5-7pm	Telephone appointments for parents and other interested parties (details on page 6)
Friday 5 April 2024	End of consultation period
May 2024	Decision to be taken by ECC Cabinet: Whether or not to publish specification to invite proposals for new school on the Wolsey Park development.

If the decision is taken to proceed then the following will apply:

Summer 2024	Application process to appoint sponsor
Summer 2024	Sponsor appointed by the Regional Director
Spring 2026	New 100-place SLD school opens on the Wolsey Park development

Proposed Special School on Wolsey Park Development

