

## Equality Impact Assessment

Reference: EQIA320581601

Submitted: 29 March 2021 09:39 AM

### Executive summary

**Title of policy or decision:** Proposal to expand New Rickstones Academy (Witham) from 900 places to 1200 places

**Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision):** This proposal would see New Rickstones Academy expand to serve the higher demand for secondary school places in the Witham area from September 2023.

**What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?:** Help people get the best start and age well

**Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help people get the best start and age well:** Help keep vulnerable children safer and enable them to fulfil their potential

**Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project?:** a new policy (or decision)

### Assessing the equality impact

**Use this section to record how you have assessed any potential impact on the communities likely to be affected by the policy (or decision):** New Rickstones Academy carried out a consultation exercise about the proposed expansion of the school. The formal consultation took place between December 2020 and 27 January 2021. The stakeholders invited to comment included all parents, senior Local Authority representatives, District Councillors and senior officers, NRA union representatives, and all local schools.

Four responses were received, all raising concerns. However, those concerns raised were by schools from outside the town and the local MP. The concerns were all around the issue of unfilled places at other secondary schools within the Braintree district, and the possible negative impact on these schools' admissions should New Rickstones expand. Whilst it is the case that some secondary schools within the Braintree district do currently have some surplus places, the school and ECC are clear that the proposed expansion at New Rickstones is required for the growing demand of places within Witham, and there are no secondary schools within a reasonable distance that would be able to take the additional pupils without additional accommodation being provided.

The building works will be procured by the County Council using framework agreements which it is entitled to use. Contractors experienced in working on projects of this type will be used. The premises to be provided will need to meet the statutory requirements of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 and the feasibility studies and the final programme will ensure that this happens.

As public buildings, schools are required to provide full accessibility in order to obtain Building Control sign-off. Essex County Council produces a set of employer's requirements which add further interpretation to ensure this is achieved from the early stages of design. Prior to planning permission application Building Control approval is sought to offer earlier compliance confirmation.

Any works to expand the building will be fully compliant with the legislation. This builds in a future-proofing dimension to our buildings, ensuring they are accessible for disabled

users.

## **Does or will the policy or decision affect:**

**Service users:** Yes

**Employees:** No

**The wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities:** No

**Which geographical areas of Essex does or will the policy or decision affect?:** Braintree

**Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?:** Yes

**Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources?:** No

**Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies?:** Yes

**Is the new or revised policy linked to a digital service (website, system or application)?:** No

## **Description of impact**

**Description of Impact.** If there is an impact on a specific protected group tick box, otherwise leave blank. You will be given the opportunity to rate identified impacts as positive, negative or neutral on the next page: No impact on any of the above groups

**I confirm that I have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics:** I confirm that I have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics

**Describe any actions that have already been taken to mitigate negative impacts on any of the protected characteristics:** This decision does represent a substantial change in resources, but in a positive way for local parents. Further, should school capacity not increase in this area then there is a risk that local parents will have to travel beyond it to secure secondary school places for their children, which is where the real negative impact would lay for them.

## **Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts**

**Does your EqIA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?:** No

## **Details of person completing the form**

**I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance:** I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance

**Date EqIA completed:** 29/03/2021

**Name of person completing the EqIA:** David Mason3

**Email address of person completing the EqIA:** David.Mason3@essex.gov.uk

**Your function:** Place and Public Health

**Your service area:** Sustainable Growth Directorate

**Your team:** School Organisation Service

**Are you submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team?:** No

**Email address of Head of Service:** joseph.chell@essex.gov.uk

## **Essex County Council**

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

#### **Expansion of Southview SEN School with residential provision Application**

##### **1.0 Context**

1.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires Essex County Council to have regard to the Public Equality Duty:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

1.2 The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage/civil partnership
- Pregnancy/maternity
- Race
- Religion/belief
- Gender and sexual orientation

1.3 In addition to the above protected characteristics ECC considers the cross-cutting elements of every proposed project and policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of the assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include

1.4 ECC uses the Equality Impact Assessment document as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what the Council does or is planning to do in the future. This exercise helps to identify where further consultation, engagement and data is required.

##### **2.0 Relevant Project**

2.1 This EIA refers to ECC's intention to expand Southview SEN School with residential provision for children with severe physical difficulties with a neurological impairment who have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

### **3.0 Description of the Project**

- 3.1 The bid is driven by the Council's statutory obligation to provide a school place for each child residing in Essex whose parents/guardians request one. In addition, it meets the Council's corporate objectives to: deliver the best possible educational outcomes for children attending schools within its administrative border; improve public health and wellbeing across Essex and, safeguard vulnerable people of all ages,
- 3.2 The expansion of Southview will provide much needed places for children aged 16 with severe physical difficulties combined with a neurological impairment in the area.
- 3.3 It is the intention of ECC to commission all the places in the new post-16 provision and residential provision. Some of the children who will be allocated a place at the school may otherwise have to travel considerable distances to access specialist provision. It is anticipated that these additional places will reduce the Council's reliance on expensive independent placements. The funds released can be invested in the education of all children with special educational needs.
- 3.4 The provision of places in Witham will enable children to access specialist provision within their communities thus facilitating the establishment of lifelong friendships and links to local organisations and services. In this manner the bid supports the Preparing for Adulthood agenda.
- 3.5 The expansion and residential premises will meet the statutory requirements of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999. The school will therefore be fully accessible to disabled users.

### **4.0 Information on the population affected**

- 4.1 The proposed expansion will be designed to accommodate children and young people over 16yrs with severe physical difficulty combined with a neurological impairment.
- 4.2 Some of these children and young people require boarding accommodation. It is for this reason that a boarding element has been included. The boarding accommodation will enable those children who require a Monday to Thursday boarding option to access it close to home. This reduces stress on families who sometimes have to travel considerable distances to visit their children.
- 4.3 Within Essex County Council:
- 15% of the school population has some sort of special need

- 3.4% of the school population currently has an Education, Health and Care Plan
- 2.1% of the school population has a Plan and is educated in mainstream schools, including specialist SEND units in mainstream schools
- 1.3% of the school population is educated in a special school

4.4 These percentages are subject to fluctuation; the trend has been upwards in recent years.

4.5 The expansion to this special school in Witham is an essential strand of the Council's strategy to meet present and projected demand for special needs places and reduce the current dependence on expensive independent placements.

4.6 The strategy was developed in consultation with all schools, the Essex Special Schools Education Trust and the Schools Forum. The Schools Forum created an Invest to Save fund to help to increase the number of special needs places and therefore reduce the reliance on the independent sector.

## **5.0 Impact of the Decision to expand the special school**

5.1 The expansion and build of the residential provision will have a very positive impact on children and young people living in the local area who have severe physical difficulties combined with a neurological impairment.

5.2 The new school will also benefit the wider population of children and young people with special educational needs as reduced reliance on expensive independent places will free up more funding to invest in the education of all children.

5.3 It is not anticipated that the proposed expansion would have a negative impact on any protected group.

## **Report Author**

This report was prepared by Ralph Holloway Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation

Date: March 2021