

Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services

Full Statutory Notice

Statutory Proposal to establish a SEN Unit for children with Autism and Speech, Language and Communication Needs at Walter Infant School

Notice is given in accordance with section 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, as amended by the Education Act 2011, and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 that Wokingham Borough Council intends to make a prescribed alteration to Walter Infant School, from 01 September 2026.

Contact Details

Name and address of Local Authority publishing the proposal:

Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

Name, address and category of school that is the subject of the proposal:

Walter Infant School & Nursery, Murray Road, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG41 2TA

A Community School

Contact details during statutory representation period:

This is a four-week consultation, which begins on 01 January 2026 and concludes at midday on 29 January 2026. Any person may object to or make comments on the proposals by sending representations to:

Piers Brunning, Education and SEND, Childrens Services, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

Email: piers.brunning@wokingham.gov.uk

A public consultation event will be held at Walter Infant School at 19:00 on 12th January 2026. All interested parties are welcome to attend this event, where presentations by

Wokingham Borough Council staff will be followed by the opportunity to ask questions and/or provide direct feedback.

Please note that the proposals are unchanged from those published by the school in 2025. The statutory guidance on making significant changes to maintained schools sets out a two-stage process, with an informal initial stage and a formal second stage, consulting a wider range of interested parties, requiring formal publication of a notice in a newspaper and online and a formal determination of the proposal by the Council.

Description of alteration and evidence of demand

Wokingham Borough Council is proposing to establish a 12-place SEN Unit for children of infant school age with Autism and Speech, Language and Communication needs at the Walter Infant School in Wokingham, for 12 pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), across Year R to Year 2 (4 places in each year group).

The SEN Unit will be located on the school's site, in classrooms released by a falling school roll.

It is proposed that this provision is matched by equivalent provision for the linked St Pauls Junior School.

Admission to this facility will be distinct from mainstream admission to the school. Children admitted to the school to attend the SEN Unit will be in addition to the PAN, and the PAN will not be reduced to take account of admissions to the SEN Unit.

This proposal has been formed in response to a growing demand for such places in the local area. In line with regional and national trends, Wokingham Borough Council has recently been experiencing substantial growth in demand for places in specialist education provision. The Council forecasts that between 2024 and 2030 the number of children with EHCPs (statutory Education, Health and Care Plans) will increase by 50% from 1,948 to 2,990. Within this overall increase, the number of children aged 5 to 10 requiring specialist provision is expected to increase by 52% (or 151) by 2030. Whilst not all the children admitted to the proposed provision will have diagnoses of Autism, this need is a close match to the planned provision focus. The number of children and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder as a primary need is expected to increase from 765 to 1,144 by 2030, an increase of 379 or 50%. The number of these children in the primary education phase requiring a specialist setting (a Special school, Resource Base or Unit) is projected to increase from 133 to 185 over the 2024 to 2030 period.

However, there is insufficient local capacity to meet this need. Consequently, the council is increasingly reliant on high cost out of borough provision in the independent and non-maintained special school sector.

In view of the unsustainable financial implications of the increase in demand, the Council has joined the DFE organised “Safety Valve” programme. This has financial advantages to the Council, but requires the Council to work closely with partners to increase the level of in borough provision. To increase local capacity, two special schools are in development and additional school-based provision is proposed. The proposed provision at the Walter Infant School is part of the programme of planned additional provision.

In 2023, 72 Wokingham children with EHCPs (3.7% of the total) were educated in Resource bases or SEN units. It is proposed that this number will increase to 148 children by 2030 (with 4.9% of all children and young people with EHCPs educated in Resource Bases or Units). By 2030 19% of total planned in borough specialist provision is planned to be in the form of Resource Bases or Units, in effect maintaining the 2023 proportion of in-borough academy/free school and maintained school provision.

The current proposal, therefore, forms part of a borough-wide expansion programme, aimed at providing sufficient SEND school places to meet the current and projected future levels of demand, delivered across both specialist and mainstream settings. If approved, this proposal would provide 12 specialist primary places within the Borough, which would help to bridge the gap between the supply of and demand for school places.

Objectives:

The proposed delivery of a 12-place SEN Unit at Walter Infant has the following objectives at its core:

1. To support Wokingham Borough Council in delivering against its role in providing sufficient school places to meet local demand. These 12 additional places will meet the needs of a key SEND growth area.
2. To broaden the Local Offer by providing more opportunity for children with SEND to attend a mainstream school with support, where appropriate. This will also help make local mainstream schools more inclusive and, in enabling a more tailored offer to local pupils, potentially improve educational outcomes as well.
3. To promote parental preference, through the expansion of SEND provision in mainstream settings.

Effect on other Educational Institutions

As mentioned above, there is an increasing demand for Autism and associated needs SEND places within the Borough. As this will be providing mainstream alternatives for

SEND pupils, it is not anticipated that the provision will have a significant impact on other mainstream institutions within the local area. Given the rate of growth in the number of children requiring this provision it is reasonably expected that this provision will be supplementary too, rather than in competition with, or to the detriment of, existing and planned local state Special School provision for children with Autism.

Project Costs

The creation of the accommodation for the proposed SEN Unit requires investment in internal alterations to existing school accommodation at an estimated cost of £520,000 (subject to agreement to the full specification and tender). The project cost will be funded through Wokingham Borough Council's High Needs Capital Allocations, which is a capital grant allocation provided by the DfE specifically to finance the expansion of SEND provision. It has been agreed through the adoption of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan that this funding will be used to fund special provision growth.

The investment of this capital will support long-term value for money, by providing a broader range of appropriately resourced, local SEND provision for the Borough's pupils, thereby reducing the need to unduly rely on more costly placements out-of-Borough and/or in the non-maintained or independent sector.

Implementation Plan

Wokingham Borough Council has complied with all applicable statutory requirements in connection with this proposal. At the conclusion of the notice period, if permission is granted by the Executive, Wokingham Borough Council will implement the proposal.

If approved, the plan is to formally open the new facility on 1st September 2026. In the first year four places will be offered in Year R. Thereafter, the provision will grow incrementally, year-on-year, with four additional places being offered in each subsequent Year R intake, with the total capacity of 12 places expected to be reached in September 2028. Admission will be by agreement with the Special Educational Needs Team of Wokingham Borough Council. All children who are offered places will have, or be about to receive, an Education, Health and Care Plan.

As noted above, this proposal does not require an amendment to the school's Admissions Arrangements.

Signed: Dr Ming Zhang, Service Director for Education & SEND, Wokingham Borough Council

Publication Date: 01 January 2026