Wokingham Borough Council Children's Services

Full Statutory Notice

Statutory Proposal to

(a) Relocate the Bearwood Primary School to new premises at Spencers Wood, Wokingham

(b) Establish a specialist base for children with Autism and Speech Language and Communication Needs at Bearwood Primary School after relocation to Spencers Wood.

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 two prescribed alterations to Bearwood Primary School, from 1st September 2028.

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:

Bearwood Primary School,
Bearwood Road, Sindlesham,
Berkshire,
RG41 5BB

The school is a Community School.

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Contact details during statutory representation period:

This is a four-week consultation, which begins on 19 November 2026 and concludes at midday on 17 December 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

Further details of the consultation are available online, where feedback can also be provided, at: Citizen engagement platform | Wokingham Borough Council .

Two public consultation events will be held. The first will be an online event using Microsoft "Town Hall" at 19:000 on 8th December 2026. The second will be an in person meeting at Bearwood Primary School at 19:00 on 15th December 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.

Description of alteration and evidence of demand

Wokingham Borough Council is proposing to relocate the Bearwood Primary School to new premises off Fulbrook Avenue, Spencers Wood, RG7 1DF from 1 September 2028. The school will offer 210 mainstream places plus a nursery. On relocation it is proposed that a new specialist base for 14 pupils across the Reception Year to Year 6 with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) naming Autism and Speech Language and Communication needs, will open at the school.

The specialist base will be located on the school's new site, in the school premises.

The relocation of the school is a response to falling demand for primary school places in the area that Bearwood Primary School currently serves (Winnersh and western edges of the Wokingham Parish area) and rising demand in the Shinfield Parish area (which includes Spencers Wood). The falling rolls in the area around the current location are a consequence of falling birth rates, seen nationally and locally, while the rising rolls in the Shinfield area are due to the ongoing residential development in the area.

The Council's School Organisation Plan 2025 sets out projections, available school places, and gap analyses for the primary phase schools for local planning areas. The Bearwood Primary School is currently in the Council's Wokingham Town West Area (the west half of the Wokingham Town Council and Winnersh Parish areas). The new site is in

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the Council's South West Primary School area (the schools within the Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Swallowfield and Barkham and Arborfield wards).

The Wokingham Town West area has ten schools. Collectively these offer 330 Reception Places (taking account of reduced admission numbers at two schools). However, the projections indicate that Reception rolls will reduce to c.260 by 2031/32. This would lead to a surplus of c.70 Reception places and an overall surplus of c.475 places (22% and 19% respectively). While there is undoubtedly scope to reduce admission numbers further, a decline in rolls of this magnitude is likely to create (at least in the short term) a mix of fully subscribed schools, and schools with significant surplus capacity, leading to financial challenges to some schools that could have an adverse impact on the education they offer. The Council would then need to consider school closure as an option to restore schools to efficient sizes. Bearwood Primary School is one of the more vulnerable local schools, starting the 2026/27 school year with significantly less than 30 children in each of the three Key Stage 1 (Infants) year groups. Relocating the Bearwood School reduces (but does not eliminate) the possibility that a local school might close and provides confidence that children on the roll of Bearwood Primary School will not face the challenges associated with school closure during their time at the school. It also protects staff from the risk of redundancy.

The new site is in the South West Planning Area. This Planning area includes two of the Council's four "Strategic Development Locations," in Shinfield and around the former Arborfield Garrison site. Approximately 3,000 new homes have been built in the Shinfield area and further residential development is anticipated in that area soon. The Arborfield area has planning consent for 3,500 homes, and over 2,000 new homes have been delivered in the area. The Spencers Wood school site was agreed in 2010 as part of the infrastructure necessary to support the new development.

In Shinfield, all schools are fully subscribed. Although there is surplus capacity in the South West Planning area, the unfilled places are at one school, in the small Arborfield Cross community. The number of children requiring Reception places in 2026 living in the Shinfield Parish area significantly exceeded the number of allocations to south west area schools (including 23 children allocated places at out of borough schools). It is a reasonable expectation that there is sufficient local demand to sustain an additional school in the Shinfield area.

Relocating a primary school from an area where it is at risk to one where demand has been strong significantly reduces the risk of school closure in the original area, protects an existing staff team from redundancy and ensures the new primary school provision in an area with a growing population opens with an experienced team and some possibility of offering places to older children (most new schools open with Reception classes and take 7 years to offer teaching across all year groups).

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The proposal to create a new SEN Unit is in response to a growing demand for such places in the Wokingham Borough area. In line with regional and national trends, Wokingham Borough has recently experienced substantial growth in demand for places in specialist education provision, and this growth is projected to continue. The Council forecasts (in the needs analysis underpinning its School Organisation Plan 2025) that between 2026 and 2030 the number of children with EHCPs (statutory Education, Health, and Care Plans) will increase by 19% from 2,509 to 2,990. Within this overall increase, the number of children requiring specialist settings is projected to increase from 1,140 to 1,346, an increase of 206 (18%) between 2026 and 2030.

The number of children and young people requiring a specialist setting, for Autism and Speech Language and Communication Needs is projected to increase from 571 to 688, an increase of 117 (20%) over this period.

The number of children of primary school age requiring a specialist setting, for Autism or Speech Language and Communication Needs is projected to increase from 192 to 231, an increase of 39 or 20% over this period.

The gap analysis in the 2025 School Organisation Plan demonstrated that an additional 54 Communication and Interaction (Autism and Speech Language and Communication Needs) Resourced Provision (now known as Specialist bases) places by the end of the plan period (2030) was required to ensure a balance in provision for the primary education phase. This would be achieved by:

a) Increased capacity at schools that had open Resourced Provision in 2024 (12 places).
b) New provision at several schools, including the proposed Specialist base at the Spencers Wood site (42 places across three schools)

Since the analysis above was completed, national policy on the education of children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities has changed. In February 2026 the government published a White Paper, “Every Child Achieving and Thriving” which set out reforms to Special Education Needs provision. These include a greater emphasis on inclusive mainstream education and prioritised the development of mainstream school “inclusion bases” (a mix of school led support bases and council commissioned specialist bases, replacing the older terminology of SEND Units and Resourced Provision). To demonstrate how these reforms would be used to improve outcomes for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities in the Wokingham area, the Council was required to produce a Local SEND Reform Plan (LSRP) This was approved by the Department for Education in November 2026. The Borough’s plans to create an additional 298 specialist base places between 2026 and 2029 (all needs and

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both primary and secondary phases) will, in both the new LSRP and the School Organisation Plan 2025,ensure that a higher proportion of the borough's children with additional needs can be educated at high-quality provision close to home and not be required to attend, often disproportionately expensive, out of borough provision.

In view of the national challenge of rising numbers of children holding Education Health and Care Plans and requiring specialist provision the Department for Education (DfE) has provided capital funding to enable local authorities to increase the number of places in state funded mainstream and special school. To increase capacity in Wokingham Borough, two special schools are in development and additional mainstream school-based provision is proposed.

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 up to 14 specialist primary places within the Borough, which would help to bridge the gap between the supply of and demand for specialist school places. It is intended that this will increase the proportion of children with EHCPs naming specialist provision who will be educated in-borough.

Admission to the SEN Base will be distinct from mainstream admission to the school. Children admitted to the school to attend the SEN Base will be in addition to the PAN, and the PAN will not be reduced to take account of admissions to the SEN Base. It is anticipated that children attending the base will be in one of the base's teaching areas for more than half their school time.

Objectives:

The proposed relocation of Bearwood Primary School to Spencers Wood and the delivery of 14 places in a specialist base at that school 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. The relocation of the school will increase capacity where demand for mainstream primary phase school places has been growing and reduce surplus capacity in an area where demand is falling. The additional places within the Specialist Base will meet the needs of a key SEND growth area.
2. To underpin the financial sustainability of the mainstream primary school sector, by relocating a school from an area of oversupply to one of undersupply, where demand for places is better assured. In addition, the education provision at

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Bearwood (and those neighbouring its current site) can be better assured, through sustainable funding.

3. 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.
4. To promote parental preference, through the expansion of SEND provision in mainstream settings.

Effect on other Educational Institutions

The transfer of the school to a new site in Spencers Wood is expected to have a beneficial impact on schools serving the Winnersh and Wokingham Town communities. Remaining schools with surplus places can expect to see increased rolls because of the move. Schools in Shinfield are at full capacity and significant numbers of children leave the area to be educated elsewhere. Consequently, the expectation is that the arrival of the school will not impact on existing schools in the Shinfield area. The out of Shinfield area schools taken by Shinfield resident children are widely dispersed, so much of the impact will also be dispersed and unlikely to have a significant impact on most of these schools. Based on 2026 admissions round data, a few schools in Earley and Arborfield may see adverse impacts, but not sufficient to threaten any school's sustainability. This negative impact is outbalanced by the wider benefits to the Spencers Wood community in having school places within walking distance of home, the additional specialist SEND capacity, and the benefits schools close to the former site,

As mentioned above, there is an increasing demand for Autism and Speech Language and Communication Needs SEND places within the Borough. As this will be providing a mainstream alternative for SEND pupils (for which there is presently no local offer in the South West of the Borough), it is not anticipated that the provision will have a significant impact on other specialist settings within the local area. Given the rate of growth in the number of children requiring this provision it is expected that this provision will be supplementary to, rather than in competition with, or to the detriment of, existing and planned local state specialist provision.

Project Costs

The creation of the accommodation for the school requires investment in new premises an estimated cost of £14,000,000 (subject to agreement to the full specification and tender). The project cost will be funded through a mixture of developer contributions (Section 106) and direct Council capital investment. It has been agreed through the adoption of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2026 to 2029.

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This capital investment will provide better value for money, enabling the Council to deliver a better service within the limits of current and future resources. It will provide a broader range of appropriately resourced, local SEND provision for the Borough's pupils, thereby reducing the need to rely on more costly placements out-of-Borough and/or in the non-maintained or independent sector, as well as the transport costs associated with such placements.

Implementation Plan

The new school site is being made available to the Council through the terms of the S106 agreement (related to planning consent 0/2013/0346) underpinning the development of the major new development in Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross. The key reserved matters consents for the new school were secured on 21st October 2025. The consents included the site plan, building elevations and floor plans of the school, along with several related strategies and schemes. A design team has been commissioned to take the build scheme to tender, and actions are currently on programme to deliver the new premises in time for the proposed September 2028 transfer.

As the school will be relocating to a new site that is in excess of 3 miles from the current location, free transport between the current school site and the new site, at the beginning and end of the school day will be offered to all children on the roll of the school on the date this proposal is determined for five years (so for the school years 2028/29 to 2032/33). Subject to there being sufficient demand, the Council intends to prove this transport either for the start and end of the school day or to enable children to use Breakfast and After School provision. Some parents may prefer that their children continue to be educated in the Winnersh or Wokingham Town area. Subject to the availability of places, they may be able to transfer to an alternative school, closer to their home. The Council appreciates this free transport offer may present challenges to parents and therefore wishes to hear from families both about any challenges this approach may generate for them and how these could be addressed.

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

If approved, the plan is to both relocate the Bearwood School and formally open the new SEND facility on 1 September 2028. While the SEND provision will grow incrementally, the pace of growth will be determined by an annual assessment of needs until all 14 places are taken. Admission to the Specialist Base will be by agreement with the Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Team of Wokingham Borough Council. All

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children who are offered places will have, or be about to receive, an Education, Health and Care Plan.

This proposal does not require an amendment to the school's Admissions Arrangements, as (a) distances to school will continue to be measured from the school site at the time the admission will occur and (b) the Published Admission Number will be unchanged.

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

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