



## Consultation: New special school for children and young people with Autism



**6 February – 13 March 2024**

### Summary of Proposals

We propose to establish a new school which, when filled, will have capacity for 192 children and young people aged 4 -16 years with a range of abilities and differences associated with autism. All of the pupils will have an Education, Health and Care plan and a primary need of autism.

The school will provide a purposefully designed autism-specific environment with a range of specialist facilities and activities available to support different aspects of learning and development. It will provide high quality specialist teaching to support children and young people whilst developing community relationships, supporting provision in mainstream schools and preparing our young people for adulthood. Pupils in the school will have access to high quality therapies and health provision on site.

The new school will also support the development of our inclusive education system as it will also provide specialist outreach support to mainstream schools to support pupils with autism and their families.

The only route to establishing a new school in the city is to follow the DfE's [Free School Presumption process](#) to appoint a multi-academy trust (MAT) to run the school. This consultation is the first stage of that process.

### Proposed site for the new school

The proposed site of the new school is [Allendale Road](#) (NE6 2SZ), a brownfield site to the east of the centre of the city which is owned by the City Council.

The site has been chosen because it is council-owned, of sufficient size, and well connected in terms of accessibility to public transport and road networks. Its location, East of the city centre in Byker ward, is on the opposite side of the city to the existing specialist school for autism, Thomas Bewick, so would enable more children with additional needs to be educated in or closer to the area where they live and spend less time travelling to and from school.

### How to respond

Please submit your response to the consultation online **by Wednesday 13 March 2024**

Link to consultation response form: <https://forms.office.com/e/i0kcLnmf0t>

If you have any difficulties accessing the online form, please email: [schoolorganisation@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:schoolorganisation@newcastle.gov.uk)

There is further information about the background, context and proposals below.



## Context

Newcastle City Council (the local authority) has a statutory duty to assess the local need for school places: to ensure that every child can be provided with a suitable place, in a state-funded school in their area, with high quality, stimulating and successful learning environments.

There has been significant growth in Newcastle's school age population in recent years which has been reflected in the expansion of schools across the city and the establishment of some new schools.

In January 2023, there were 46,706 pupils in Newcastle schools, including 7,915 with a Special Educational Need and/or a Disability (SEND), of those 123 pupils were educated in a non-maintained special school.

There has been significant growth in the numbers of pupils with SEND due to general population growth and increased incidence, especially of autism.

The number of pupils in Newcastle schools<sup>1</sup> identified with SEND has increased from 6,880 in 2016/17 to 7,915 in 2022/23. Of these, pupils with Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans<sup>2</sup> have increased by 78% in the same period to 1,961 in 2022/23. By comparison, the number of pupils with EHCPs has increased by 56% in the North East Region and 61% in England over the same period.

The needs of the vast majority of SEND children and young people are met in their mainstream setting and the proportion of children and young people with EHCPs being educated in mainstream rather than specialist settings has increased over time to 60% in 2022/23.

All special schools in Newcastle have expanded in recent years to address the increased need for specialist places, especially Thomas Bewick which is our special school for pupils with autism. Other special schools in the city are also admitting more children and young people with autism.

In January 2013, there were 102 pupils aged 4-19 years on roll at Thomas Bewick, which had increased to 314 pupils on roll in January 2023. There have been three significant physical expansions of the school during this period with a further expansion currently taking place to provide additional places for September 2024.

Despite these expansions, all special school places in the city are filled and an increasing number of children and young people with EHCPs are being placed in independent and non-maintained special schools due to a lack of available places in state-funded special schools in the city. At the end of August 2023, the number of pupils who were educated in

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<sup>1</sup> Includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, non-maintained special schools, state-funded alternative provision schools and independent schools

<sup>2</sup> An EHC plan is for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. EHC plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support needed to meet those needs.



independent or non-maintained special schools had increased to 189 and 117 of these pupils had autism as their primary need.

## SEND Strategy

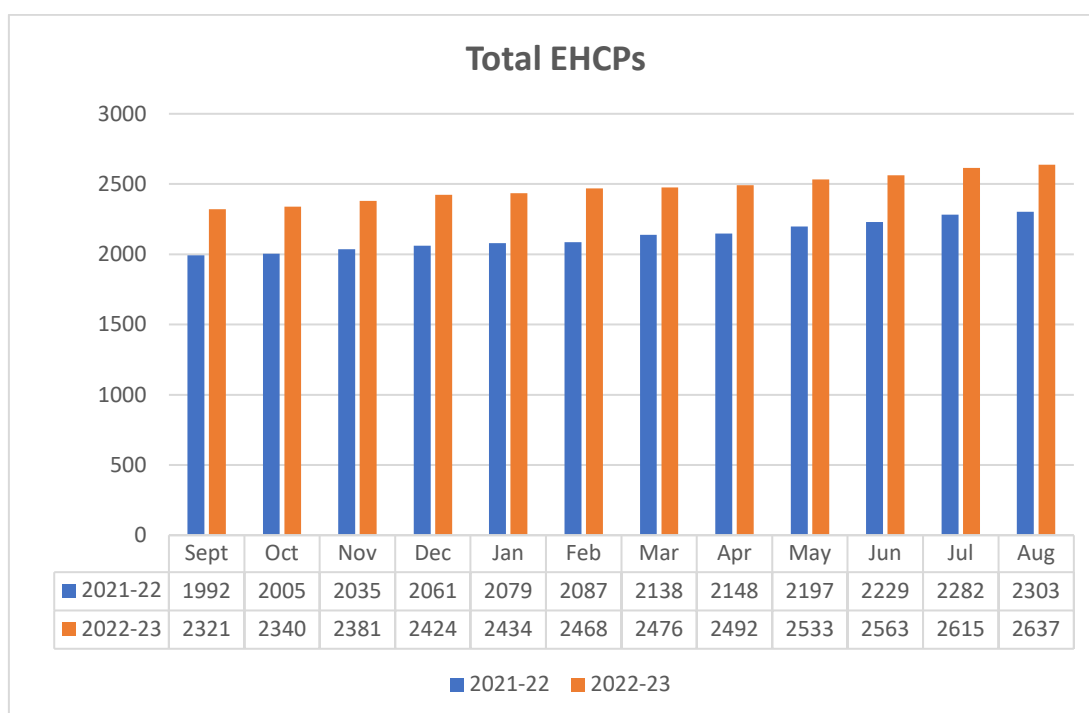
Our [SEND Strategy 2023-2028](#), published in September 2023, sets out our shared ambition which is:

‘to create an inclusive city that ensures that children and young people with SEND get the right support at the right time and go on to live their best lives’

This strategy has been co-produced, which means that we have worked with parents/carers, children and young people so we focus on the things that matter to them. It is important to us all that we ‘get it right together’ and we are all committed to working together to ensure our children and young people receive support at the right time. One of the key actions in the strategy is to ensure that there are sufficient specialist places for those that need them, including the development of a new school for those with autism.

## Growing need for services for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

There is a high demand for EHC assessments and in August 2023 we had 2,637 children and young people aged 0 to 25 years with an EHC plan, an increase of 646 compared to September 2021, as shown in the chart below.



The number of pupils with communication and interaction needs (with includes pupils with autism and speech, language and communication needs) is the largest area of need in Newcastle for pupils on SEN Support and with EHC plans. Numbers have increased from 2,365 in 2019/2020 to 3,201 in 2022/2023.



The numbers of new referrals to the Early Years' Service for pupils aged 2-3 years with either a confirmed diagnosis or undergoing an autism assessment has increased from 169 or 89% in 2019-20 to 320 in 2022-23.

More of our children with an EHCP are attending a mainstream school or setting, 60% in 2023, compared to 52% in 2019/20.

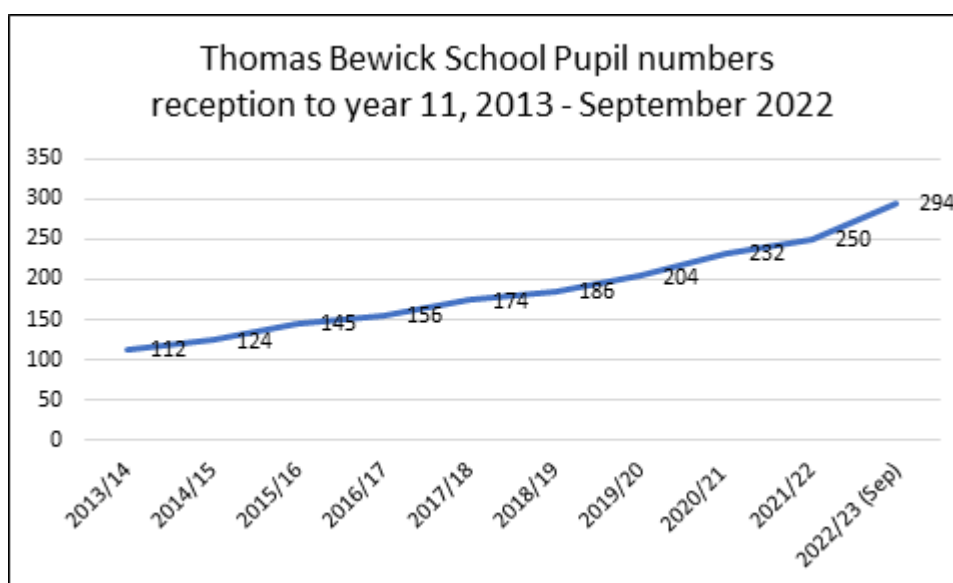
### **Specialist provision for pupils with autism in Newcastle**

[Thomas Bewick School](#) (TBS) is currently our only specialist school for children and young people with autism. It is an all-through school for pupils aged 4-19 years. The school opened in 1999 with 53 pupils on roll and, following significant investment in a number of capital projects to increase capacity, now operates across three sites.

In September 2023, there were 336 specialist placements for children and young people with autism in Thomas Bewick School, 317 of whom were in reception to year 11. A further 94 pupils had placements in Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) within mainstream schools.

We also currently commission 117 places in independent and non-maintained providers at a cost of £5,400,000 for pre-16 and £1,035,000 for post-16. These figures do not include the cost of home to school transport. It is highly unlikely that a child will move from an independent provider once placed, so costs are committed for the full academic life of the pupil, and sometimes up to the age of 25 years

The increase in numbers on roll at Thomas Bewick in reception to year 11 over the last 10 years is shown in the graph below:



The current size of the school significantly exceeds the average size of special schools nationally which is 139 pupils on roll. Thomas Bewick currently has 336 places, including post-16, which is forecast to grow to 360 by September 2024.



As Thomas Bewick is located in the Outer West of the city and serves the whole city. A new school should preferably be located to the East of the city to enable children and young people with autism to attend schools closer to where they live. As well as benefitting these children, young people and their families directly, this would reduce the carbon impact of daily home to school journeys, which are usually made by taxi or mini bus and funded by the City Council.

## **Meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND**

In response to the increase in demand we have:

- invested heavily to support children and young people in mainstream schools/settings to prevent, where possible, the need for specialist provision. This is known as the 'graduated response' and more details can be found on this document: [The Graduated Response Explained](#).
- built in assessment places at our specialist primary school, which has provided us with the opportunity to fully assess the needs of young children
- increased additional specialist provision at our existing special schools and in our Communication and Interaction Additionally Resourced Provisions (ARPs) in mainstream schools: [Newcastle Schools Provision \(newcastlesupportdirectory.org.uk\)](#)
- additional specialist places have also been created by expanding existing provision, but this is no longer practical or sustainable.

Despite this, we still have a greater demand for places than can be met from current special school provision in the city, and, we have become more reliant on independent special schools, particularly for pupils with autism.

## **Future needs**

A mainstream school/setting will remain the most appropriate provision for many of our children and young people with autism, although a substantial number of children and young people will also need specialist places.

We are projecting that there will be further increased demand for additional specialist educational places for those with autism. The number of pupils with an EHCP and autism primary need in state-funded special schools for pupils in Reception to Year 11 is forecast to increase by 140 pupils by 2027/28.

## **Proposal – the new school**

We propose to establish a new school, which when filled, will have capacity for 192 children and young people aged 4 -16 years with a range of abilities and differences associated with autism. All of the pupils will have an EHC plan and a primary need of autism.

The school will provide a purposefully designed autism-specific environment with a range of specialist facilities and activities available to support different aspects of learning and development. It will provide high quality specialist teaching to support children and young people whilst developing community relationships, supporting provision in mainstream





schools and preparing our young people for adulthood. Pupils in the school will have access to high quality therapies and health provision on site.

The proposed new school does not include pre-school or post-16 provision. We aim for all of our early years children to be able to access an early years mainstream setting. We will not place children and young people in a specialist provision unless we are sure that this level of specialism is required to meet their needs. For those pupils over the age of 16, a significant proportion, will have been supported throughout their school journey to develop the skills needed to enter a mainstream post-16 college or other setting, with appropriate support, including vocational provision. Where specialist post-16 provision is most appropriate, transition to this will be supported

The new school will also support the development of our inclusive education system as it will also provide specialist outreach support to mainstream schools to support pupils with autism and their families.

When established, via the [free school presumption process](#), the new school will be an academy. The presumption process will determine which multi-academy trust will be appointed to run the new school.

The proposed site of the new school is [Allendale Road](#) (NE6 2SZ), a brownfield site to the east of the centre of the city which is owned by the City Council. It is currently used by the Council and consists of buildings providing office accommodation and stores as well as substantial car-parking.

The site has been chosen because it is council-owned, of sufficient size, and well connected in terms of accessibility to public transport and road networks. Its location, East of the city centre in Byker ward, is on the opposite side of the city to the existing specialist school for autism, Thomas Bewick, so would enable more children with additional needs to be educated in or closer to the area where they live and spend less time travelling to and from school.

The new school is required as soon as possible, which is currently proposed to be September 2026 given the various steps needed to get to that point.

The DfE guidance (see link above) sets out a seven-step process for running a free school presumption competition, the first stage being a consultation on this proposal.

We are, therefore, seeking stakeholder views on this proposal and inviting you to respond using the online form in the link below:

<https://forms.office.com/e/i0kcLnmf0t>

Please respond by **Wednesday 13 March 2024**