

Proposed expansion of Willow Dene School – summary of consultation

Background / the proposal

1. The Compass Partnership has worked closely with Royal Greenwich to respond to rising demand for special school places, including growth at Swingate Lane and establishing Oakmere Road.
2. Royal Greenwich project the need for approximately 100 primary and 100 secondary places for pupils with autism and complex needs, plus sixth form provision. Royal Greenwich approached Compass with a view to achieving this growth through a two-stage expansion of Willow Dene School:
 - a. To add 112 primary-phase places at the existing Swingate Lane site (112 pupils being the equivalent of 2 classes per year group although the school does not organise pupils exclusively on an age-basis); and
 - b. To create up to 152 secondary-phase places at the proposed Hargood Road site in Kidbrooke, comprising 80 pupils for Years 7 – 11 (equivalent of 2 classes per year group) and up to 72 sixth form places.

Consultation

3. Consultation about the proposed expansion was undertaken between 4 May and 22 June 2021. The list of consultees that received materials about the proposed expansion is provided in the Appendix. Online meetings were held for staff, parents, and local residents. Unfortunately, the firm appointed to deliver to local residents around both sites failed to deliver the materials at the beginning of the consultation; as soon as this was identified to the school updated materials – with an additional open event at Swingate Lane and an additional online consultation event for Hargood Road – were distributed, this time successfully.
4. There were 107 responses to the online questionnaire, 3 email responses, as well as attendance at the staff briefing, parents meeting, online meeting, and Swingate Lane open event.
5. Of the online and email responses, 43 were from Willow Dene members of staff, 10 were from Willow Dene parents, 40 were from local residents (very largely, but not exclusively, referring to the Swingate Lane site), 14 were from individuals employed in NHS / other schools / community projects, and 3 were from parents of children at other schools.
6. The following were identified as key benefits or opportunities of the proposal:
 - a. Additional special school places, which respondents argued were much needed to meet increased demand and could help reduce tribunal demands. This was by far the most commonly identified benefit;
 - b. Establishment of a sixth form so that pupils could continue at Willow Dene;

- c. Advantages stemming from being a larger school, such as greater staff expertise, greater ability to group pupils appropriately to meet their needs, broader range of facilities available etc; and
- d. Increasing amount of 'all-through' provision within the school so that pupils can be supported from early years through to sixth form.

7. The following table identifies issues raised and responses from the Willow Dene Executive Headteacher. The vast majority of the responses related to Swingate Lane.

Issue from consultation responses	Response from Executive Headteacher
<p>Concerns regarding parking, access / egress, and traffic congestion. Many respondents noted that these issues already inconvenienced residents, and that significant expansion would exacerbate the issue.</p> <p>This was by far the most commonly raised issue. It was raised by staff, visiting staff such as therapists, residents, and parents, including those who were otherwise (often strongly) in favour of expansion.</p> <p>Some responses made suggestions for responding to this challenge, including public transport investment, onsite car parking, or use of some local green space.</p> <p>Some responses linked this to the broader idea of the relationship between the school and its neighbours.</p>	<p>This issue is recognised and accepted as a significant concern for both sites, which is shared by the school staff as well as our neighbours. It is potentially the most significant risk to the expansion.</p> <p>The school is committed to working in partnership with Royal Greenwich to identify solutions that are acceptable for staff and residents at both sites.</p> <p>This issue will be determined through the planning application process, informed by traffic and transport assessments. Local residents will be able to respond to the planning applications, and those will need to outline the proposed solution(s).</p> <p>If a solution is unable to be found that satisfies planners, then planning permission would not be granted and that scheme would not progress.</p>
<p>Whether the capital project would provide appropriate facilities (and still leave appropriate outdoor space).</p> <p>This included a potential concern about inequity of facilities for pupils on different sites / with different needs if funding was insufficient.</p> <p>One response questioned whether there could be a residential element with an emphasis upon life skills and independence as part of preparing for adult-hood.</p>	<p>Design meetings for Swingate Lane have already commenced, and DfE guidance for special school buildings (Building Bulletin 103) is the starting point for the accommodation schedule.</p> <p>There is currently no intention to provide a residential element for sixth form life-skills / independent living.</p>
<p>The implications of expansion upon the staffing needed by the school and by associated services (such as NHS) and the need to plan for this increase in staffing to ensure both appropriate quantity and quality of staffing</p>	<p>The need to effectively plan for the growth in staffing is already within the Willow Dene strategic plan. The increases in capacity would happen over approximately 4-5 years at each site, with Swingate Lane potentially a year ahead of Hargood Road.</p> <p>As well as growing school staffing, the leadership team will work with partners such as the NHS to advise of the growing need for services to enable them to plan their own staffing growth.</p>

<p>Concern that the sixth form provision on Hargood Road may only be for the expansion (i.e. pupils with autism and complex needs) rather than the complex needs cohort based at Oakmere Road. This was raised primarily by school staff concerned about the educational inequality it raises.</p>	<p>This concern is shared by the leadership team and trustees and is the subject of further discussion with Royal Greenwich.</p>
<p>Concern about the practical implications of the capital project upon local residents through construction traffic, noise, pollution etc.</p>	<p>This concern is recognised and accepted. Swingate Lane residents expressed concern that the previous contractor did not adhere to the agreements regarding site delivery and site operation times.</p> <p>The school expects Royal Greenwich and the contractor to engage effectively with the community to minimise the impact of the building project and to communicate accurately about the disruption that they may experience.</p>
<p>Whether staff (or more staff) would be required to work across multiple sites</p>	<p>Willow Dene is already based on two sites, with a staffing model whereby class-based staff are site based to ensure knowledge of individual pupils and provide the consistency that is necessary to maximise their progress, while specialist and leadership staff operate across both sites.</p> <p>This model would be continued, and expanded to include the three sites. Capacity in specialist and leadership teams would increase to reflect the growth of the school.</p>
<p>Whether the expansion was sufficient (i.e. would it provide sufficient places to meet Royal Greenwich's needs) or whether it would have a negative impact upon other special schools if Willow Dene continues to be very well regarded.</p>	<p>It would remain the responsibility of Royal Greenwich to secure sufficient provision, and Compass would continue to work closely with the council to support that objective.</p>

8. The key educational issue raised in the consultation concerns sixth form provision for pupils with complex needs.
9. The consultation raised a number of issues that are about the delivery of the expansion (i.e. the 'how' rather than the 'why'). It is clear that these – especially parking and impact upon local roads and residents – are important to staff, parents, and residents. The Compass Partnership considers that these are most appropriately considered in detail through the design process and planning application process, noting that without planning permission the expansion cannot proceed at either Swingate Lane or Hargood Road.

Next steps

10. Application submitted to DfE for the expansion of Willow Dene School – to be submitted in summer 2021.
11. Developing capital scheme for Swingate Lane with associated planning application processes
12. Developing capital scheme for Hargood Road with associated planning application processes

Appendix 1: List of consultees

The following table details who was sent information about the consultation.

Stakeholder	Person
Parents	All parents at WDS
Parents	Parents at other Compass schools
Staff	All staff at WDS
Staff	Staff at other Compass schools / central teams
WDS Governors and Compass Trustees	All Governors and Trustees
All special and mainstream schools in RBG– HTs	To HTs of all special and mainstream schools in RBG
Principal – London South East Colleges	Dr Sam Parrett OBE
RBG	Lead Member: Cllr Matthew Morrow DCS: Florence Kroll
Ward councillors – Swingate Lane	Shooters Hill ward: Cllr Sarah Merrill Cllr Danny Thorpe
Ward councillors – Oakmere Road	Plumstead ward: Cllr Angela Cornforth Cllr Rajinder James Cllr Matthew Morrow
Ward councillors – Hargood Road	Kidbrook with Hornfair ward: Cllr Norman Adams Cllr David Stanley
MP	Clive Efford
Director of Children’s Service of any LA that maintains EHCP of any pupil at WDS	Bexley: Stephen Kitchman Bromley: Janet Bailey
SEND Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenwich Parent Carer Participation Forum • Greenwich Greenlights Project • Greenwich National Autistic Society • Young Greenwich, Parenting support for parents with or without SEND • Autistic Inclusive Meets • TAS Centre
Local residents	Swingate Lane
Local residents	Hargood Road
Trade Unions	To borough reps of recognised TUs / Prof Associations