



Department
for Education

Somerset County Council

**Seeking proposals to establish a
Special Free School**

March 2019

SECTION ONE: OVERVIEW

1. Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) is working collaboratively with selected Local Authorities to establish new schools that fit within the local authorities' strategies for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those requiring alternative provision. This opportunity is intended to identify and meet untapped demand for special and alternative provision free schools as a supplement to LAs' existing resources. If a strong proposal is received by a trust that both the Local Authority and the Secretary of State wish to take forward, DfE will provide capital funding and start-up grants subject to value for money assessments.

This document sets out the key information regarding the school that Somerset County Council will be establishing alongside DfE. Trusts should use the information within this document, alongside the engagement events, to determine whether they would like to apply to open the school, and to base their application on.

2. Key dates

24 July 2018	Special and AP free schools wave is launched – the guidance and criteria for local authorities seeking to establish new special or alternative provision free schools is published.
11 March 2019	Announcement of successful LA bids. Competitions in successful areas subsequently open.
30 September 2019	Deadline for proposers to submit applications in successful areas.
September – December 2019	Assessment of potential proposer group applications
Winter 2019	Secretary of State's decision on successful proposer groups
Early 2020	Announcement of successful proposer groups

3. Contact details and further information

If you would like any further information or would like to discuss your application, please contact:

Name: Phil Curd
Job title: Strategic Manager – Access & Additional Learning Needs
Email: pjcurd@somerset.gov.uk
Tel: 01823 355165

If you would like any further information or would like to discuss the site, please contact:

Name: Charlie Field
Job title: Head of Estates
Email: cwfield@somerset.gov.uk
Tel: 01823 355325

Please find below the contact details of the Regional Schools Commissioner:

RSC: Lisa Mannall
RSC's office: South West England
Email: rsc.sw@education.gov.uk

4. Somerset County Council Context and Planning

Please include here details of why the local authority is running this competition and requires this school. Should this be a joint bid, please explain how the local authorities will work together and how other local authorities are involved in commissioning places.

Somerset has around 78,000 children of statutory school age. Of these just over 9900 are considered to have SEND with around 1369 (1.7%) of those having EHCPs and a further 1075 children with high needs funding support who will convert to EHCPs over the next 18 months.

Once these conversions have been completed, 3.1% of Somerset's school children will have an EHCP, aligning us much more closely with the regional average (2.8%) and national average (2.9%).

Of those of statutory school age (4-16) children currently with an EHCP, 760 are in special schools with 614 children in maintained special schools and 146 in independent & non-maintained special schools. 122 of the 146 are in day placements due to the lack of state funded special school places.

Independent places are on average 2 times more expensive than special school places.

This bid is shaped around Somerset's aspiration to balance its special school offer and ensure children with social emotional and mental health needs, many of whom will also have Speech, language and communication needs (SEMH and SLCN) can be educated close to home in good quality provision. This is an unusual bid in that it seeks to provide support for two distinct types of need, however the common factor is that all children will have displayed challenging behaviour which has resulted in them being unable to access local mainstream provision. Both need types require different teaching and learning interventions. As a commissioning partner, Devon County Council will place an annually agreed number of children at the school using Somerset's statutory panel processes.

Somerset's projections are published annually in its School Place Planning Infrastructure Growth Plan and indicate continued demand for places across the county. Special School Place projections are calculated using data from 5 virtual catchment areas, each built around existing specialist provision. They are:

- Taunton & West Somerset
- Sedgemoor
- Central Somerset
- Mendip
- South Somerset

Projections for special school places in each of Somerset's virtual catchment areas can be found by clicking on or copying and pasting the link below in to a web browser:

<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=124125>

Devon County Council wish to be a commissioning partner and will place an annually agreed number of children at the school using Somerset's statutory panel processes.

This bid also aligns very clearly with Somerset's SEND Strategy:

Somerset's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0 - 25.

The policy itself can be found by copying and pasting the link below in to a web browser:

<https://slp.somerset.org.uk/ipost/iPost%20Documents/Somerset%20SEND%20Strategy%202016-19.pdf>

Our vision in Somerset is clear:

"We want every child and young person to have the greatest possible opportunity to be the best they can be, to be happy, and have choice and control over their life."

To achieve this the strategy identifies five outcomes, produced in partnership with schools, our parent carer forum and SEND professionals:

- ***Outcome 1 – our families, children and young people report a positive experience of our SEND systems and support, feel empowered and confident to engage and to make decisions.***
- ***Outcome 2 – timely and accurate assessment and identification of SEND across education, health and care services.***
- ***Outcome 3 – inclusive and equitable access to good quality local education.***
- ***Outcome 4 – smooth and effective transitions happen at key points for the child and young person.***
- ***Outcome 5 – creative partnership working delivers effective, fair and transparent systems and services.***

Outcome 3 focuses on ***inclusive and equitable access to good quality local education***. Under Outcome 3 the following clarification is given:

"This means that there is a sufficient and appropriate range of provision for children and young people with SEND and education happens as close as possible to their home."

Somerset has committed significant investment to expand its special school estate. Generic special school provision (PMLD, SLD, ASD & MLD) is being expanded in Taunton while funding has been approved to significantly increase provision in Bridgwater and design work is nearly complete. Earlier this year bids for additional capital investment were submitted to expand both generic special schools in Yeovil and the outcome of that submission is expected in January 2019.

In addition to those special school projects, over the last 18 months 4 new or expanded ASD Resource Bases have been delivered in Bridgwater and Taunton while the two ASD Resource Bases in Yeovil will be expanded during the Spring term of 2019.

This bid is designed to address the inequitable provision of special school places for children in South Somerset with challenging behaviours stemming from SEMH and SLCN.

Provision to meet these needs locally is the missing part of Somerset's special provision jigsaw and as such, we are submitting what we believe to be a strong joint bid with our partners from Devon County Council.

SECTION TWO: THE SCHOOL

Type of school	Special
Area of SEN provided for (please detail designation alongside additional information known about the cohort's needs and abilities)	<p>SLCN & SEMH.</p> <p>This will enable provision to be made for children with differing learning needs whose behavioural presentation prevent engagement in mainstream education.</p> <p>Funding would be consistent with the specialist top-up banding system employed for places in all maintained special schools across the county.</p>
Which local authorities are committed to commissioning places?	Somerset & Devon
How many places have been commissioned and by which local authority?	<p>Upon opening</p> <p>Somerset: 52</p> <p>Devon: 12</p> <p>When full:</p> <p>Somerset: 105</p> <p>Devon: 15</p>
Per-pupil revenue funding the local authority would expect to pay (if a range of rates, please explain and detail the rates per pupil, including estimates for how many of the cohort will be in each band)	<p>£10k per place (base funding) plus £variable per pupil (top-up funding), dependent on need. Somerset employs 7 banded top-up amounts which are allocated to pupils based on the complexity of their needs:</p> <p>Band 1 = £1,530</p> <p>Band 2 = £3,443</p> <p>Band 3 = £7,268</p> <p>Band 4 = £11,475</p> <p>Band 5 = £15,300</p> <p>Band 6 = £19,125</p> <p>Band 7 = £25,245</p> <p>It is anticipated that all children would be in receipt of at least Band 3 with most at Band 4 and above.</p>
Age range	5-16
Gender (Boys/Girls/Co-educational)	Co-educational

Total number of proposed full time equivalent places (once school is at full capacity)	120
Type of placements offered (e.g. full time, short term, part time)	Full-time
Number of nursery places, if applicable	0
Number of 16-19 places, if applicable	0
Any planned outreach, training and/or reintegration support (including details of funding that will be made available to support the school with this)	Once open, the local authority will be keen to host discussions about the development of an outreach offer which supports local mainstream schools to become more resilient and better manage the needs of children exhibiting challenging behaviour with the aim of reducing exclusions and demand for specialist provision.

The table below details the number of places that the local authority proposes for each year group at the point of opening until the school is full:

	Year of opening	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6
Nursery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reception	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Key stage 1 (Y1-2)	8	8	16	16	16	16	16
Key stage 2 (Y3-6)	16	24	32	32	32	32	32
Key stage 3 (Y7-9)	24	32	40	40	40	40	40
Key stage 4 (Y10-11)	16	24	32	32	32	32	32
16-19: commissioner referred	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	64	88	120	120	120	120	120

SECTION THREE: RATIONALE AND CONTEXT FOR THE SCHOOL

This section describes the rationale and the context in which the new school will operate.

3A. Please include a brief description of the existing provision in your area, future expected growth in pupil numbers and how you expect places to be filled.

Somerset's only maintained SEMH school, Sky College, is located in Taunton and can accommodate up to 65 pupils. Its location makes access for children in the eastern half of the county difficult, as it's at least an hour by car, and site constraints prevent it being expanded to accommodate more children. As a result, Somerset has an over-reliance on places in the independent and non-maintained sector.

To give a fuller picture of SEMH need in the county, in addition to those children currently placed at Sky College, there are a further 85 Somerset children aged 4-16 with a primary need of SEMH placed in independent and non-maintained special schools. Based on the averages above, these placements alone create an additional pressure of at least £1.7m annually.

Historically, Somerset has inaccurately identified SEMH, and it is recognised that a number of children currently identified as having that need, are more likely to have a SLCN need.

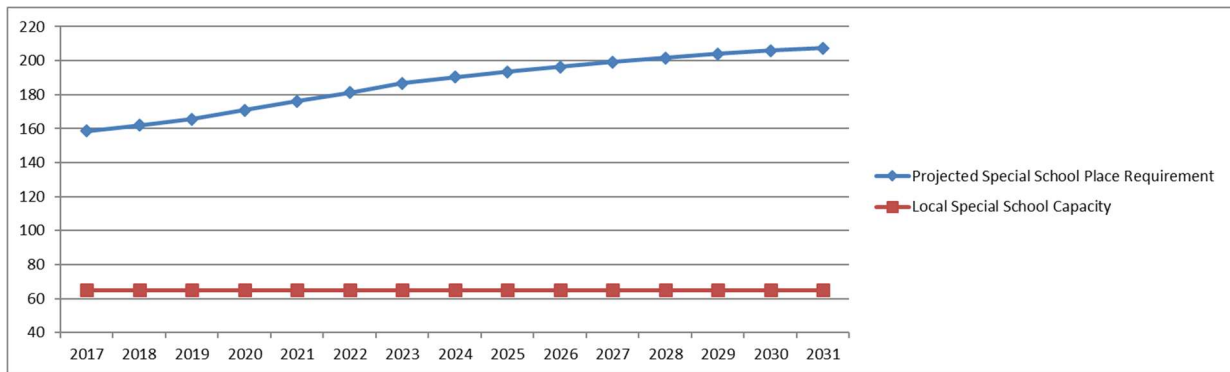
Statistically, this is backed up through local and SEN2 data when Somerset's children with EHCPs are compared against national averages:

Type of Need	Averages	
	Somerset	National
SEMH	23.5%	12.8%
SLCN	9.6%	14.6%

To address this, the dual-cohort nature of the proposed school will enable children placed in a specialist provision as a result of their challenging behaviour, to be educated on a single site, but in a safe and appropriate environment with teaching and learning interventions relevant to their SEN.

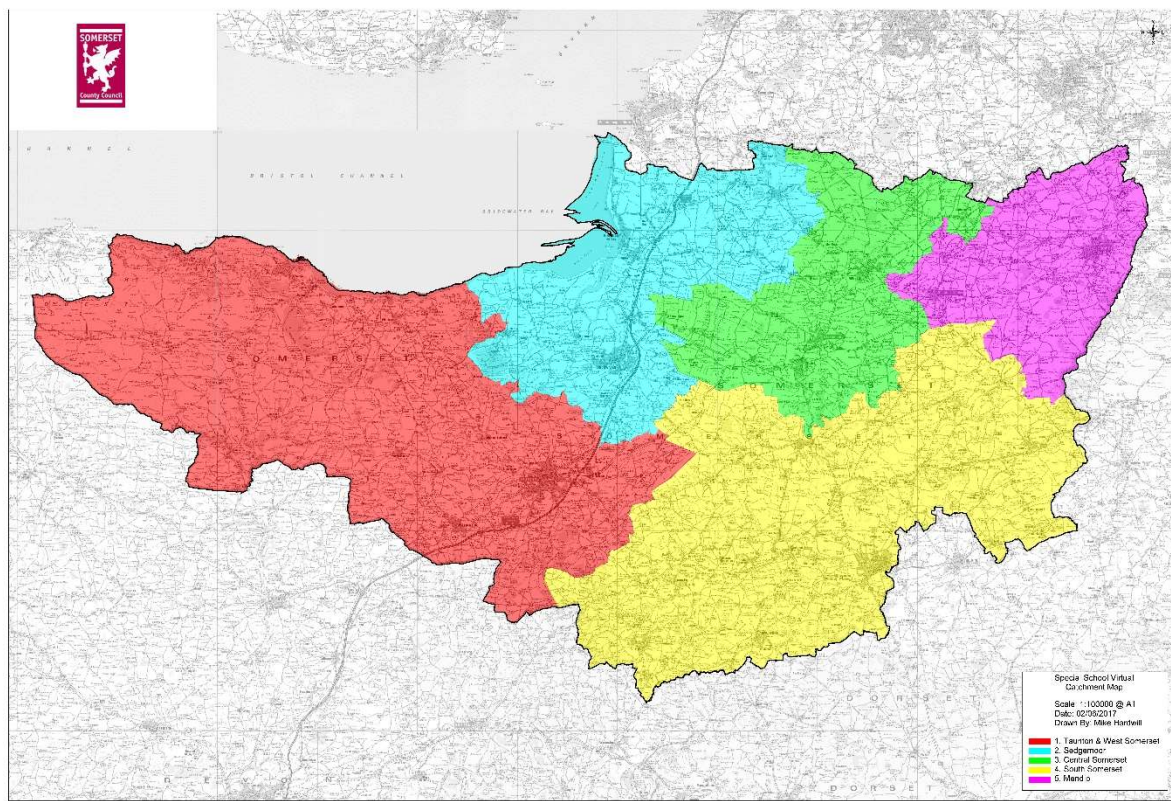
Each cohort would follow a separate curriculum offer relevant to their SEN.

Special school place projection models for Somerset put demand for SEMH special school places in Somerset at in excess of 180 by 2022. The below graph is taken from our place planning projections for SEMH (see link in Section 1:5 above) and project need, based on current trends, until 2031.



This bid is designed to accommodate children with the relevant level of need located in the virtual catchment of South Somerset (in yellow below) and some children living in the Central Somerset (green), Mendip (pink) virtual catchment areas and children from our partner authority Devon, which sits just below the red and yellow shaded areas.

The map below highlights the geographical extent of each virtual catchment area:



The key population centres in the South Somerset virtual catchment are:

- Yeovil
- Chard
- Crewkerne
- Wincanton
- Langport
- Somerton
- Ilminster

Somerset is also experiencing a period of increasing exclusions from mainstream schools and parents opting to electively home educate their children. The addition of this new school and its expertise would create opportunities for the development of an outreach offer which would support schools to become more resilient and manage the needs of pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour.

Introduction of state-funded provision in South Somerset, would have immediate benefits; Reduce travelling time for pupils who would otherwise have to travel to special provision in Taunton, reduce associated transport costs, reduce the need to commission places from independent and non-maintained providers and the additional costs associated with those placements.

3B Please also include details as to how these proposed new arrangements are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for children with special educational needs, and the outcomes for pupils, across the local authority and how you expect trusts to support this.

As outlined previously, Somerset is investing significantly in its special school estate in order to deliver good quality places for children and young people with SEND. These places will be close to home, designed for purpose and provide environments which enable high quality teaching and learning.

Our gap is in the provision of places for children living in South Somerset whose SEMH / SLCN needs result in challenging behaviour. At present those children would have to travel out of their community to Somerset's only maintained SEMH school, Sky College in Taunton. That journey takes at least an hour, pupils arrive frustrated and fatigued and are difficult to engage.

The distance creates a barrier for parents so their engagement with the school and their child's education is limited, affecting outcomes. Sky College can only accommodate boys aged 10-16, so girls or younger children have to be placed in independent and non-maintained provision across Somerset and over its borders in to neighbouring counties.

Again, this means children leave their local community for education, impacting on their ability to develop and maintain appropriate peer relationships. The relatively high cost of these placements puts additional strain on an already pressured high needs budget.

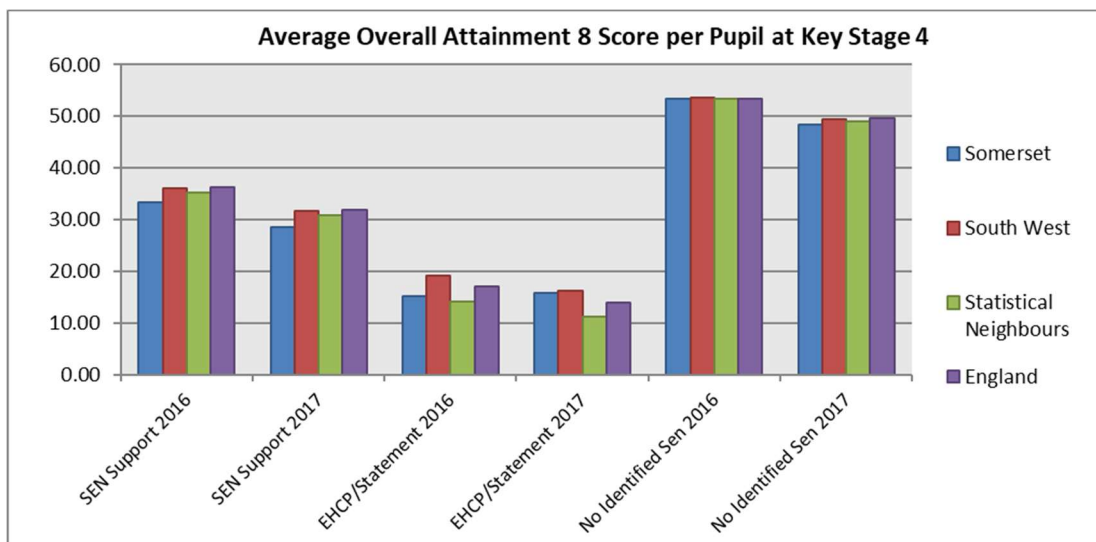
If successful, this bid will see the delivery of a school right in the heart of South Somerset but also within reasonable distance of Dorset (Sherborne 12 miles) and Devon (Axminster 20 miles). On that basis, Devon has decided to formally support this bid and commission places from the new school. Dorset is supportive of the bid and has committed to commissioning places should their own free school bid be unsuccessful.

Its location will mean no child SEMH / SLCN needs will have to leave their local community for education, reducing and removing barriers to engagement and associated costs.

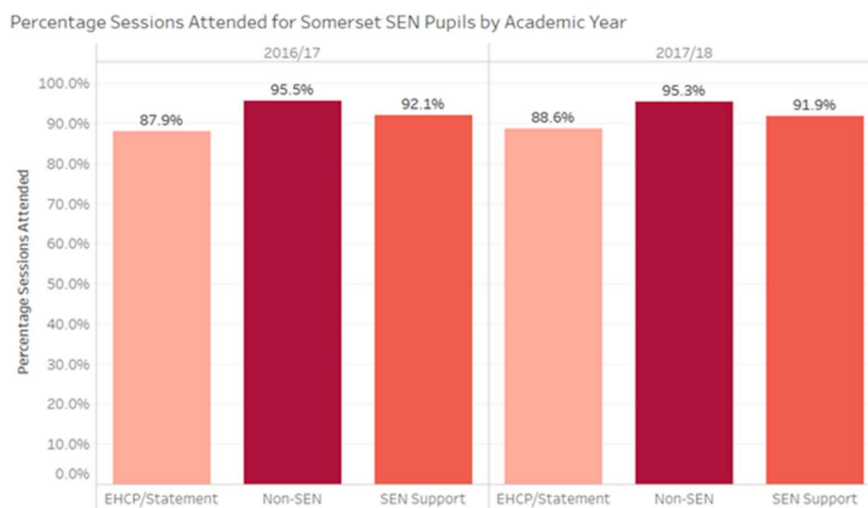
The dual-cohort nature of the school will mean that children with similar challenging behaviours, but very different needs, can be educated separately but on a single site, designed for purpose.

The expected outcomes of a successful bid are clear and would have a significant impact on Somerset and its children:

- **Attainment:** An ambitious educational offer which meets needs, will support children to achieve. Although Somerset’s EHCP children do well when compared to national averages, we are keen to close the Attainment 8 gap seen when compared to regional neighbours (seen below).



- **Attendance:** Good quality provision, where children feel engaged, safe and less anxious will have a positive impact on attendance rates, supporting children with EHCPs to close the attendance gap on their non-SEN peers (see below).



- **Destinations:** Developing partnerships with local FE colleges and training providers will support children to engage in effective transition pathways, reducing the NEET figures of children with SEND and closing the gap seen between them and their non-SEND peers.
- **Accurate Identification:** Having a dual-cohort entry reduces the risk of children with challenging behaviour having their needs wrongly identified and placed in inappropriate provision. With the implementation of this model, the school will be able to assess children upon entry and decide which stream or cohort that child is best placed, in order to meet their needs.
- **Local Provision:** Boys and girls, aged 5-16, from South Somerset who require specialist provision to address challenging behaviour will, for the first time, be able to be educated in their local community. This will enable them to develop and maintain appropriate peer relationships in and out of school and will remove geographical barriers which have historically prevented parents engaging as closely as possible in their child's education.
- **Improved Engagement:** By creating provision close to home, children will be prevented from travelling further, for longer periods of time, meaning they will arrive at school ready to engage in their learning, improving their chances of fulfilling their learning potential and their educational outcomes in terms of progress and attainment.
- **Reduced Financial and Environmental Costs:** Less travelling will also reduce transport costs to the local authority and reduce the pollution associated with the vehicles undertaking those journeys.
- **Early Intervention:** With a wider age range, children will be able to be placed at a younger age, enabling expert practitioners to address their needs at the earliest opportunity. If this can be facilitated, there is a good possibility of children being able to transition back to mainstream provision at appropriate phases, where with the right support, they will achieve better educational outcomes and improved transitions to adulthood.
- **Development of Peer to Peer Support:** The introduction of this type of specialist expertise in South Somerset creates outreach opportunities for the school. By working in partnership with the local authority, local schools and other stakeholders, an outreach offer to support mainstream schools to become more resilient, reduce exclusions and manage more children with challenging behaviour in their settings can be developed. This will also have the benefit of reducing the use of and costs associated with PRU placements.
- **Efficient Use of Resources:** The cost benefits of additional state-funded provision are also important. Due to a lack of capacity, many of Somerset's children with behavioural needs are placed in independent and non-maintained provision at significant additional cost. By being able to align this new schools funding arrangements with Somerset's existing banded system will reduce pressure on the high needs budget and allow resources to be focused elsewhere.

An unintended consequence of establishing new provision might be a stimulation of demand for special school places. This would be tackled in two ways; through the development of outreach provision to support mainstream schools work with children with challenging behaviour and increase the top-up funding available to mainstream schools by distributing the savings achieved by not having to purchase placements in the independent and non-maintained sector.

SECTION FOUR: THE PROPOSED LOCATION AND SITE

This section describes the provisional site.

Full address and full postcode	Ash, Martock, Somerset
Size of site	11 acres (44,515m ²)
Further details on site (for example, current use/your reasons for choosing it/further developments (e.g. housing) planned for area	<p>The site is flat agricultural field (no buildings), not liable to flood, and fairly regular in shape. It is also owned by the local authority and could be made available when required.</p> <p>It's strategically located, close to a main arterial route to enable access from across the South Somerset area and the counties of Devon and Dorset.</p> <p>Its central position and relative proximity to South Somerset's major population centres is a key reason for its selection.</p> <p>In terms of proximity:</p> <p>Yeovil: 6 miles Crewkerne: 9 miles Chard: 16 miles Wincanton: 19 miles Shepton Mallet: 20 miles Sherborne (Dorset): 12 miles Axminster (Devon): 20 miles</p>