

Removal of SEN Unit

For pupils with Visual Impairment at George Abbot School

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Document Control

Date	Version	Comments
27/04/22	1.0	Public consultation, starting 27/04/22
26/05/22	1.1	RSC Proposal
29/06/22	2.1	Updated to reflect decision: approved by RSC Advisory Board

1 Introduction

Following a public consultation and approval by the South East regional Schools commissioners' Advisory Board Meeting on 23 June 2022, George Abbot School, part of Learning Partners Academy Trust ("the trust"), will remove the specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School from 1 September 2022. The space vacated by this unit will be redirected for educational use.

2 Background

George Abbot is a secondary school, situated in Burpham, Guildford, Surrey. The school has 1915 pupils currently on roll (as of 12 January 2022).

At the end of the 2021-22 academic year, the Visual Impairment Unit will have no students placed within the provision. There have been no Year 7 admissions to the Visual Impairment Unit since 2017. Additionally, the unit placed one Year 12 student in September 2019. This unit is therefore not a cost-effective provision. Additionally, Surrey's pupil data indicates that there will not be sufficient pupils to populate this unit over the coming years. Students who require a specialist Visual Impairment Unit at secondary school will be accommodated at the other two secondary Visual Impairment Units in Surrey.

The school has a 'Good' Ofsted rating from the last inspection, in December 2019.

The school will continue to retain SEN staff who are experienced in supporting students with visual impairments. We would, therefore, continue to be able to successfully support students who have attended mainstream primary school settings.

3 Rationale

There has been no demand for Year 7 places in this dedicated specialist unit in the last four academic years (and no pupils will attend the unit at the point of possible closure). George Abbot School Visual Impairment Unit is one of three specialist secondary Visual Impairment provisions in Surrey. The other two secondary Visual Impairment Units, located at Oxted and Woking High Schools, have placed all Year 7 specialist Visual Impairment admissions to secondary schools in Surrey in the last 4 years. Additionally, these secondary specialist Visual Impairment Units are each located close to a specialist Visual Impairment primary provision. These students most naturally feed into the Visual Impairment Units at Oxted and Woking High. Surrey's place planning analysis indicates that there is not an ongoing need for a Visual Impairment Unit in this part of Surrey – Woking High is located nearby, geographically and can meet anticipated need, alongside the provision offered at Oxted School. Furthermore, Woking College is suggested as a possible post-16 centre more locally, by Surrey County Council.

The Local Authority under which this provision sits, Surrey County Council, were supportive of this proposal. Please refer to their Educational Justification as outlined in Appendix 1.

4 Considerations

4.1 Pupil Placement

School places are allocated in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014, which requires the Local Authority to take into account the pupil's special educational needs, parental request for schools and the formal view of the schools requested before making a decision. Student Visual Impairment numbers at primary indicate that there are sufficient places at

Oxted and Woking High secondary Visual Impairment Units to place all young people within a specialist provision.

4.2 Staffing

The proposed change will result in absorption of Visual Impairment staff into the wider SEN and teaching team at George Abbot School. Our Qualified Teacher of Visual Impairment (QTVI) is part-time – we have repeatedly been unable to train or employ a full-time QTVI. This does impact on student provision. A QTVI is an essential staffing requirement for a Visual Impairment Unit.

4.3 Land & Buildings

The space allocated to the Visual Impairment Specialist Unit at George Abbot would be utilised to support students with identified Special Educational Needs – currently 14% of our school population.

4.4 Finance & Resourcing

The school receives place funding from Surrey County Council for the maintenance of the Visual Impairment Unit. Historically, George Abbot has a funding agreement for 9 paid places. The funding per place is £6,000 per occupied place and £10,000 per unoccupied place. George Abbot would no longer receive this funding. This reduction in funding can be managed within the George Abbot budget as the students to whom this money is allocated will not be on the school roll. There is no ongoing budget impact of this change. Additionally, the closure of the unit will mean that unoccupied place funding can be redistributed for other Surrey SEN provision; this is significant within the current context of the High Needs block deficit at Surrey.

5 Consultations, approvals and timescales

In order to enact the proposed changes, we have followed the statutory process outlined by the Department for Education 'Making significant changes to an open academy and closure by mutual agreement' guidance.

5.1 Public Consultation

A public consultation ran for a 4-week period from Wednesday 27 April to Wednesday 25 May 2022. Consultation feedback was sought via the following methods:

- Online questionnaire
- Letter
- Public Forum

This provided an opportunity for consultees to make their views known, allowing the school and trust to reflect on the proposal before finalising this business case.

24 written responses were received

- 13 are in favour
- 2 are neutral – accepting that closure is inevitable
- 6 believe the closure is too soon
- 5 are completely against the closure

A Public Forum Meeting was attended by 1 parent, 3 Sight for Surrey colleagues, 1 Union Rep, 4 Visual Impairment Unit staff, 1 Headteacher. The following key points were discussed:

- 6th form provision in the vicinity of Woking High and Sight for Surrey funding implications
- Parental feedback regarding lack of continuity of QTVI provision at George Abbot
- Site accessibility at George Abbot compared with Woking High
- Potential inaccuracy in Surrey's modelling of student numbers, due to EHCPs being identified on transition from Year 6 to Year 7.
- Potential to support visual impairment in mainstream education, when not identified on an EHCP

Further concerns raised in written feedback:

- Children's needs must be at the heart of decision-making
- Concerns over planned 6th form location and travel
- Would temporary closure be an option?
- Is the closure of the VI Unity too soon?

Favourable response themes:

- Acceptable as there appears to be no need for the provision based on recent pupil numbers and ongoing predictions
- Good use of government finances, if there is no planned need
- There seems to be adequate alternative provision in the community
- Great to use the physical space for general SEND needs
- Better for VI pupils to be amongst other VI pupils, therefore fewer, fuller centres better

5.2 Trust Recommendation

It was recommended to the Regional Schools Commissioner that we should proceed to close the George Abbot Visual Impairment Unit. This is on the basis of:

- An inability to guarantee expert QTVI staffing despite sustained efforts. We currently have part-time QTVI provision only
- Low future secondary Visual Impairment student numbers in the South West of Surrey, for all of whom, provision could be met at the Woking High Visual Impairment centre
- No placements in Year 7 for the last 4 years
- One 6th form admission in the last 5 years – this student did not come from Woking High
- No student admissions planned for September 2022 – 6th form or Year 7 or in-year
- A Unit that will be empty as of the end of the academic year 2021- 2022
- We would be able to redeploy staff within existing staffing needs.

5.3 Decision by Regional Schools Commissioner

Following this, feedback was summarised and submitted to the Regional Schools Commissioner, as part of the overall business case. This was considered by the RSC advisory board meeting on 23 June 2022 and approved.

5.4 Outcome

The outcome of the consultation is published on the trust website: (<https://www.learningpartners.org/968/consultation>) and available via the school website (<https://georgeabbot.surrey.sch.uk>).

10 Appendix 1: SCC Educational Justification

Please refer to separate document.

11 Appendix 2: Frequently Asked Questions

11.1 Impact on Pupils and their Families

How many pupils will be impacted by this closure?

None. With effect from September 2022, there will be no pupils at this specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School. The students who have applied to George Abbot with Visual Impairment needs who have attended mainstream primary schools without Visual Impairment Units will continue to be able to attend this school from September 2022. There will not be guaranteed access to a Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment, but our experienced SEN team will be able to meet Visual Impairment needs for these students.

What has recent demand been?

Recent demand has seen no Year 7 admissions to the specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School, for the last four academic years. The unit has admitted one Year 12 student in 2019.

Year	New Admissions	Pupil Numbers
2022	0	0
2021	0	3
2020	0	5
2019	1	5
2018	0	6

Has there been any interest for 2022-23?

Whilst we have received enquiries from families about taking up places in the unit for 2022-23, it was notable that none of these parents have made representations online, in writing or in person during our 4-week consultation. It remains the case that there are no student admissions planned for September 2022.

Why is the removal being sought now?

By monitoring pupil admissions over the above period, the school, trust and Local Authority have sufficient evidence to determine that there is no demand for this provision. This is confirmed by Surrey place planning data which indicates that student needs can be met through the provision offered at the other two Surrey Visual Impairment Units.

Why aren't you proposing the VI unit remain open longer, with a qualified Visual Impairment Teacher, in case there is a pupil in need?

Our QTVI is part-time. This will leave us with an inadequate QTVI coverage to provide confidence for future Visual Impairment students and their parents. We have spent 5 years attempting to recruit a QTVI, in partnership with the support of Surrey County Council, alongside starting and completing QTVI training for a number of staff – including our current

part-time QTVI. This training has been funded by school and Surrey, jointly. The staffing risk of no QTVI is high – this will have an impact on students within the unit. Proceeding to keep the unit open on this basis is a risk which will impact on our ability to meet student need. There is a national shortage of QTVIs and this is acknowledged by Surrey Visual Impairment colleagues as well as Sight for Surrey.

Has COVID had an impact on the unit's pupils or families?

We have seen no change in demand for the Special Educational Needs Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School as a result of COVID.

Where will pupils go instead?

Pupils with Visual Impairment who require a specialist unit placement will be able to access specialist provision at the two other Surrey Visual Impairment Units based at Woking High School (11-16) and Oxted School (11-18). Furthermore, Woking College is suggested as a possible post-16 centre more locally, by Surrey County Council. Students who have attended mainstream primary schools without Visual Impairment Units are highly likely to continue to have their Visual Impairment needs met via the experienced George Abbot SEN team.

How will families be impacted by this closure?

Families will be able to access two secondary Visual Impairment Units which have close working relationships with their two local primary Visual Impairment specialist provisions. No families will be affected by the closure as there will be no students within the unit with effect from 2022. Surrey confirms that the George Abbot Unit is not required to meet capacity, as it is placed out of the geographic area where there is demand for places.

11.2 Impact on Staff

What will be the impact on George Abbot School staff as a result of this closure?

We plan to redeploy staff internally, as advised throughout consultation.

11.3 Impact on Schools

Will local Visual Impairment Units see an increase in demand as a result of closure?

Woking High and Oxted Visual Impairment Units have already been meeting the demand for secondary Visual Impairment places over the last four years as there have been no Year 7 placements at George Abbot School. The only exception is the placement of one KS5 student in 2019. This historic success for our local Visual Impairment Units and Surrey's place planning data indicate that demand can be met at the other two centres. Additionally, demand for Visual Impairment places is located in a different Surrey quadrant area, thus making George Abbot geographically distant for Surrey's Visual Impairment students.

11.4 Impact on local Community

How will the local community of George Abbot School be impacted by this change?

The space dedicated to host the specialist Visual Impairment Unit will be vacant of pupils from 1 September 2022. The space will be redeployed to offer additional intervention and learning spaces for all SEN students at our school, thereby serving our local community.

11 Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment

11.1 Explaining the matter assessed

What policy, function or service change is being assessed?	Removal of specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School.
Why does this Equality Impact assessment need to be completed?	To identify possible impacts on individuals and groups with protected characteristics and plan mitigating action accordingly.
Who is affected by the proposals outlined above?	The proposal would impact any pupils wishing to apply to the specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School who have previously been educated at a primary school with a specialist Visual Impairment Unit. Students with Visual Impairment needs who have been educated within a mainstream primary setting are likely to continue to be able to access appropriate support at George Abbot.
What evidence has been gathered on the impact of the proposal?	<p>There has been no placement of a Year 7 pupil to the specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School in the last 4 years. Demand has been met by the two other secondary Surrey Visual Impairment Units.</p> <p>Consultation with Surrey County Council demonstrated that they are supportive of this move. As a consequence of the lack of demand, Surrey County Council would no longer fund the unit and would remove all associated specialist equipment. Furthermore, the Local Authority has written an educational justification in support of this proposal (see Appendix 1)</p> <p>See consultation outcomes in section 10.</p>

11.2 Characteristics Considered

Which protected characteristics have been considered as part of this assessment? [Please explain]	
<input type="checkbox"/> Age, including younger and older people	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disability	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender reassignment	
<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy and maternity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Race including ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality	
<input type="checkbox"/> Religion or belief, including lack of belief	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sex	
<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual orientation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Marriage/civil partnerships	
Which other characteristics have been considered as part of this assessment? [Please explain]	
<input type="checkbox"/> Carers protected by association	
<input type="checkbox"/> Socio-economic disadvantage	

11.3 Impacts and Mitigating Actions

Characteristic	Disability		
Overall Impact	Neutral		
Impact Identified	Pupils will be able to access a Visual Impairment Unit in two other Surrey secondary schools. The demand for places will be met through the provision at these units.		
Supporting Evidence	There has been no new demand for Year 7 places at this unit for the previous 4 academic years, therefore there is no evidence to support a negative impact. All pupils currently in the unit will leave at the end of the 2021 academic year. Students with Visual Impairment needs who have been educated within a mainstream primary setting are likely to continue to be able to access appropriate support at George Abbot.		
How we will maximise the positive impact or minimise the negative impact	All schools have a duty to offer facilities appropriate to their pupils with a disability under the Equalities Act 2010. Additionally Visual Impairment students who require specialist provision will be able to access two secondary Visual Impairment Units at either end of the county. Place planning data indicates that places at these units will be sufficient to meet student demand.		
When this will be implemented by	Ongoing.		
Owner	Local Authorities e.g. Surrey County Council.		
What data do we have on impacted pupils?	Demand for places at the specialist Visual Impairment Unit at George Abbot School:		
	Year	Year 7 Admissions	
	2021-22	0	
	2020-21	0	
	2019-20	0	
	2018-19	0	
What other changes are taking place that may impact this group of individuals?	None identified.		
Are there any impacts that cannot be mitigated?	None identified.		