



Decision No: CY18

Subject: Agreement to publish a Public Notice as part of the expansion consultation process to expand Ravenswood Special School, Nailsea from a range of 112 to 119 places to a range of 134 – 140 places to help to meet the increasing demand for pupil places for those with moderate learning difficulties

Key Decision: Yes

Reason: Ravenswood School supports pupils aged 3 – 19 from across North Somerset with Autistic Spectrum Disorder; Speech, Language and Communication; Moderate Learning Difficulties, Severe Learning Difficulties, Visual Impairment needs and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

Background:

Ravenswood Special School (Ravenswood) is located in Nailsea and supports pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) who have Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD); Speech, Language and Communication (SLC); Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), Visual Impairment needs (VI) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

Decision PC42, approved in November 2020, gave permission for the first phase of consultations to take place seeking approval to expand Ravenswood School from its range of between 112 – 119 places (depending on the needs of the pupils) to a higher range of between 134 – 140 places from September 2021 onwards.

This consultation took place between 20 November and 18 December 2020. It included targeted requests to known stakeholders, the publication of the consultation the Council's web-based consultation platform e.consult, and a virtual public engagement session on 9 December 2020.

The consultation outcomes showed over-whelming support for the changes. There were 28 responses comprising of 3 from parents/carers (11%); 3 from teaching staff (11%); 2 from teaching assistant staff (7%); 2 from Governors (7%); 1 from a pupil (3%); 7 from

members of the community (25%) and 10 others (36%). Of those who have responded, 25 (89%) are in support of the proposal and 3 (11%) have no view. The responses can be found within Appendix 1.

In addition, 4 stakeholders participated in the virtual public engagement session, the notes of which can be found within Appendix 2.

Decision:

To approve the publication of a Public Notice to expand Ravenswood Special School, Nailsea from a range of 112 to 119 places to a range of 134 – 140 places to help to meet the increasing demand for pupil places for those with moderate learning difficulties.

Reasons:

Increasing the place value admission levels of Ravenswood would increase the numbers of permanent available places from a current minimum of 112 to up to a maximum of 140 places (dependent on the needs of the pupils on the site). Initially the growth would be concentrated in the infant phase where there is a significant increase in demand, although extra provision across all cohorts is needed and possible.

Options Considered:

To not expand the school and rely on meeting the needs of North Somerset pupils through commissioning places at schools and other settings outside of this area.

To expand the school to admit up to a maximum of 150 pupils. A recent site assessment has shown that, with some internal modification, the maximum capacity of the site should be for up to 134 - 140 pupils (dependent on need).

Financial Implications:

Special Schools are funded from the high needs block of the schools' budget, which is funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant. Funds are distributed to schools based on formulas and allocations set by the Strategic Schools' Forum (SSF). The High Needs block not only covers maintained special schools and the Council's Pupil Referral Unit, but also SEND Top Up Funding and placements for pupils in independent and private non-maintained schools.

Costs and Revenue Funding

Additional funding is available to schools that have a significant pupil growth during a financial year. For special schools, based on the current policies, the funding the school will receive from existing budgets is as below:

- i. If numbers exceed the places agreed when the individual school's budget was allocated, then the school will receive 1/12th of the place funding for each place each month that the places are exceeded.
- ii. The school will also receive Top-up Funding (TUF) for these pupils appropriate to their needs and in accordance with the banding agrees with the Strategic School's Forum.

It is likely that for the 2021/22 school year, if the pupils that could be allocated places at Ravenswood were to be educated outside of North Somerset, the likely cost of their placements per annum would be in the region of an average of £41,400 per annum per student. In addition, there would be home to school transport costs that are dependent on the journey length and numbers of pupils in each vehicle.

The likely average revenue costs of a place at Ravenswood are c. £20,790, made up of £10,000 place funding, plus the estimated average Top Up Funding of £10,790. In addition, the home to school transport costs are likely to be less. As a result, the average saving per pupil, when compared with the average out of area placement, is likely to be in the region of £20,610 per annum, plus any savings in transport costs.

The additional place funding and top up funding will be funded from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) on this “invest to save” basis. Whilst the HNB of the DSG has a substantial deficit, this action is designed to mitigate future cost increases and is a material element of our DSG Deficit Management Plan.

Capital Funding

A small grant of £28,000 was made available to Ravenswood to enable small site upgrades to parts of the adjacent now vacant Voyage Learning Campus (VLC) site; this was funded by a contribution from the Specialist Provision Earmarked Reserve. They are currently using parts of the site on a short-term lease basis. Further changes to the site would be needed to enable it to accommodate between 134 and 140 pupils. These are expected to cost in the region of £50 - £100k and the funding for this will be approved separately as part of an amendment to the capital programme.

Legal Powers and Implications:

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 sets out how Local Authorities should exercise their statutory duties to secure primary and secondary education to meet the needs of the population in their area. The Education and Inspection Act 2006 enhanced the role of Local Authorities, making them strategic commissioners of services with a mandate to promote high standards for all and greater choice and diversity.

The Education Act (EA) 1996 Section 14A, added by Section 3 of Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 requires Local authorities to consider and respond appropriately to parental representations about school provision in relation to local authorities’ functions under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996. Local Authorities must reasonably consider parental representations regarding the provision of schools and respond accordingly, including outlining any proposed action or, where it is considered action is not needed, to explain the reasons for this.

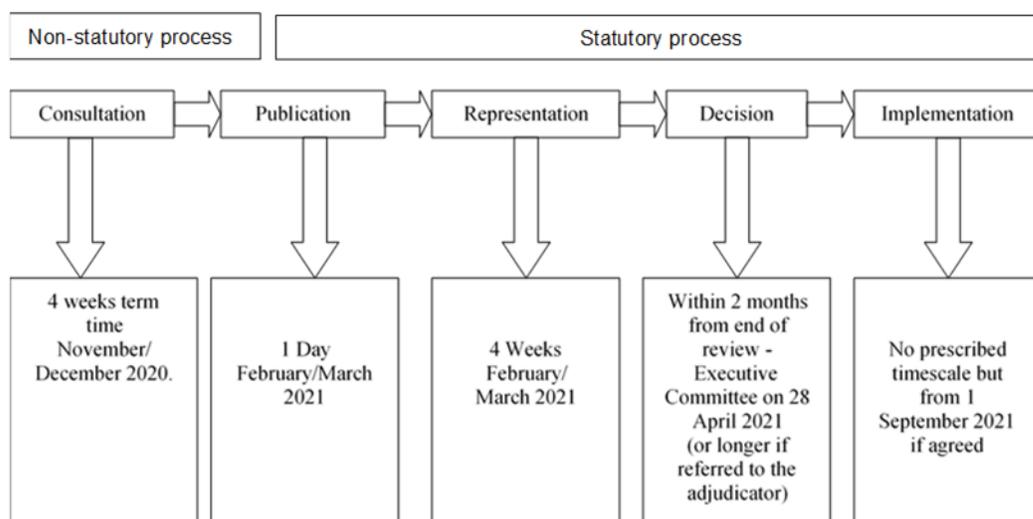
The Education Act 2011 maintains the role of Local Authorities as the strategic commissioner of services but provides greater autonomy of education provision by the encouragement of the establishment of academies, free schools, studio schools and Enterprise Colleges that are independent of the Local Authority. The Act gives Local Authorities ‘a critical new role as strengthened champions of choice, securing a wide range of education options for parents and families, ensuring there are sufficient high-quality school places, co-ordinating fair admissions, promoting social justice by supporting vulnerable children, and challenging schools which fail to improve.’

Climate Change and Environmental Implications:

The nature of Ravenswood's pupils' needs is such that most are likely to be taken to school on minibuses that will be accommodated on site. Often pupils qualify for free home-to-school transport. The Council is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Reducing the journey lengths of pupils attending special schools, some of whom may have to attend schools outside of the area if they cannot be allocated a school place more locally, will assist with this commitment.

Consultation:

The 'Making Significant Changes (prescribed alterations) to Maintained Schools ~ Statutory Guidance for Proposers and Decision Makers – October 2018 recommends that Local Authorities should consult interested parties when developing proposals prior to the formal publication of any proposals. For the significant changes such as the one being recommended, this would include holding consultations and virtual public meetings during term time.



Consultations took place between 20 November and 18 December 2020. Consultees included stakeholders of the school i.e. families of children of the school; pupils of the school; potential pupils of the school via known early years providers; any other school affected by the change; the governing body/staff of the school and other schools affected by the change in North Somerset and at schools with places commissioned by North Somerset outside the area; trade unions; the local MPs; Town and Parish Councils; the Diocese of Bath & Wells; Diocese of Clifton; Early Years Stakeholders; neighbours of the school and other members of the general public. There were targeted updates to known stakeholders, the publication of the consultation on the Council's web-based consultation platform e.consult and a virtual public engagement on 9 December 2020.

The consultation outcomes showed over-whelming support for the changes. There were 28 responses comprising of 3 from parents/carers (11%); 3 from teaching staff (11%); 2 from teaching assistant staff (7%); 2 from Governors (7%); 1 from a pupil (3%); 7 from members of the community (25%) and 10 others (36%). Of those who have responded, 25

(89%) are in support of the proposal and 3 (11%) have no view. The responses can be found within Appendix 1.

In addition, 4 stakeholders participated in the virtual public engagement session, the notes of which can be found within Appendix 2.

The CYPS Policy & Scrutiny Panel, at their meeting on 29 October 2020, supported the commencement of consultations to expand Ravenswood School. The CYPS Policy & Scrutiny Panel School Organisation Steering Group received a further update about the proposals on 26 November 2020 and of the consultation responses on 19 January 2021. They continue to be fully supportive of the changes proposed.

The Governing Body of Ravenswood School met on 20 January 2021 to review the responses to the consultation. They have issued the statement below:

'The Governing Body of Ravenswood School unanimously endorses the proposal to increase pupil numbers at the school. It will provide much-needed extra places for young people with SEN(D) and thereby reduce the number having to attend placements out of the area.'

In summary, those responding recognised the importance of having additional specialist placements, although there was some concern raised about the need to have appropriate facilities and staff and to avoid duplication with other local providers such as Weston College. There was also a concern shared that expanding schools could be detrimental to those who needed smaller provisions and that new school may be a better option.

The next stage in this process is the publication of a Public Notice in February, to end in March 2021.

The Council's Executive is the body that will need to determine whether the school should be expanded. It can agree with the proposal, agree to the proposals with certain conditions or reject the proposal. The legislation requires a decision to be referred to the Decision Maker within two months of the end of the consultation period (the end date for the Statutory Notice). Allowing for reviews, the first Executive Committee meeting date is likely to be 28 April 2021. The local Diocesan Bodies, School Trustees and the school's Governing Body are the only organisations that have the right to appeal to the School's Adjudicator against the Council's decision.

Risk Management:

Whilst early consultations with the public are not statutory, it is important that the strategic plans and commissioning strategies the school and Council wishes to pursue in relation to its special education provision planning should be shared with schools, other partners and local stakeholders. By consulting on proposed plans, the risk of not providing the right forms of education can be mitigated. The consultation has shown that the expansion is supported.

In expanding current schools, the Council must be mindful not to compromise the educational opportunities available to pupils prior to the expansion. The school will need to manage increases in pupils and staff numbers. Having new staff can bring benefits of wider experience and expertise that can be available to all the pupils.

There is no major capital scheme requirement for this expansion, although the Council would look to transfer parts of the vacant VLC site to Ravenswood if the expansion is agreed. Some further internal modifications are required for which a budget of around £50 - £100k would be required.

As this increase in places will not be confirmed prior to the Autumn 2020 place return, there will not be any Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) funding allocated within the national allocations for the 2020/21 academic year for Ravenswood. This can be rectified in the 2021/22 return if the expansion is formally approved. As a result, the Council will need to apply the “in-year changes” process whereby we pay the place funding monthly based on actual numbers at the school (rather than the whole additional capacity). The Council will work closely with the school to ensure that all places allocated are for those pupils requiring specialist placements and not for children who could stay or be placed in mainstream settings.

Equality Implications:

An EIA assessment was undertaken prior to the start of this process. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 the School has the following public sector equality duties:

- I. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- II. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- III. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In planning of the expansion of Ravenswood, the Expansion Group considered the impact this could have on a range of equality groups including: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage or civil partnership. These groups are described as ‘protected characteristics’ in the Equality Act 2010.

In summary, initial thoughts if the proposal were to go ahead, were that the impact on the protected groups overall will be positive. The consultation material asked if consultees have equalities concerns so the impact could be re-assessed at the end of the consultation period.

Since undertaking the consultation, the EIA has been reviewed and has been changed as shown below.

There were two consultees who expressed concerns regarding the Public Sector Equality Duties. One notification was from a student within a protected group, but they gave no reasons for their concerns. The second was a parent/carer of a child in a protected group who expressed nervousness that expanding the school could be detrimental to those who benefitted from attending a small school. A smaller school can be beneficial for the needs of some students with anxieties that require special consideration to be given to them by having appropriate personal space. There were expressed concerns that this could be compromised.

Whilst it is accepted there will be more pupils able to attend Ravenswood if approval to expand the school is given, an assessment of the site has been undertaken. The expansion in pupil numbers is also supported by an expansion in buildings and classrooms available. Whilst there will be extra pupils on site, the site and the spaces available for pupils will also be extended. The school is experienced in meeting the needs of its pupils and will do all within its available resources to ensure the needs of these children can continue to be met.

In terms of the EIA it is felt that with appropriate mitigations undertaken by the school, who are experienced in caring for their pupils, the benefit of the school being able to accommodate additional pupils is greater than the risk of harm. There is no harm identified in relation to different genders and the risk to those on low incomes has been reduced as no concerns were identified. The change remains positive for disabled people and the consultation has shown this is a positive change for SEND children aged 4 – 19.

Protected Characteristic Groups	Before Consultation	After Consultation
	Impact: High (H) Medium (M) Low (L) or None (N)	Impact: High (H) Medium (M) Low (L) or None (N)
Disabled people	H	H
People from different ethnic groups	N	N
Men and women	L	N
Lesbian, gay or bisexual People	N	N
People on a low income	M	N
People age groups	M	H
People in particular faith groups	N	N
Transgender people	N	N
People who are married or in a civil partnership	N	N
Women who are pregnant or on maternity leave	N	N

Corporate Implications:

The Council has a duty to meet the school-place needs of primary and secondary-aged

pupils living in North Somerset including those with special educational needs and disabilities. This consultation process intends to seek the views of pupils, parents, staff and local stakeholders to ensure that the best possible long-term educational outcomes can be achieved for children with moderate learning difficulties and that local resources are used effectively across the whole district.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - a summary of the responses

Appendix 2 – notes of the virtual public meeting held on Wednesday 9 December 2020

Background Papers:

Children & Young People Policy & Scrutiny Panel - <https://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/Meetings/ByCommittee/11/2020/88>

Signatories:

Decision Maker(s):



Signed:

Title: Executive Member for Children’s Services and Lifelong Learning

Date: 5.2.21

With Advice From:



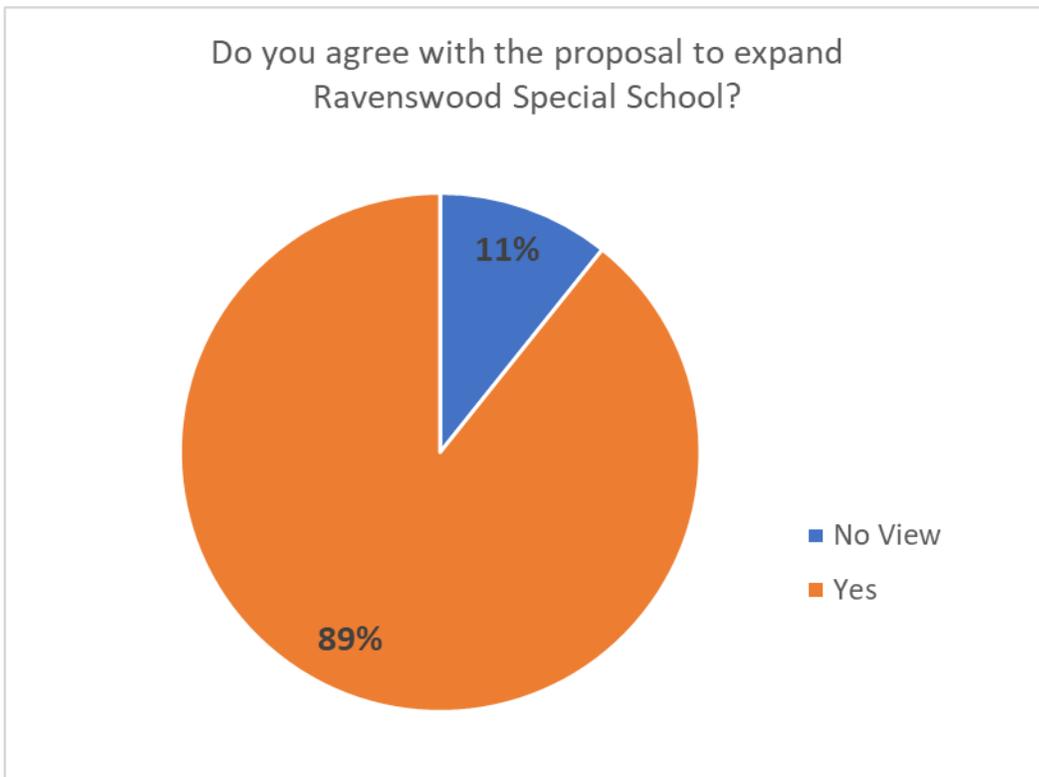
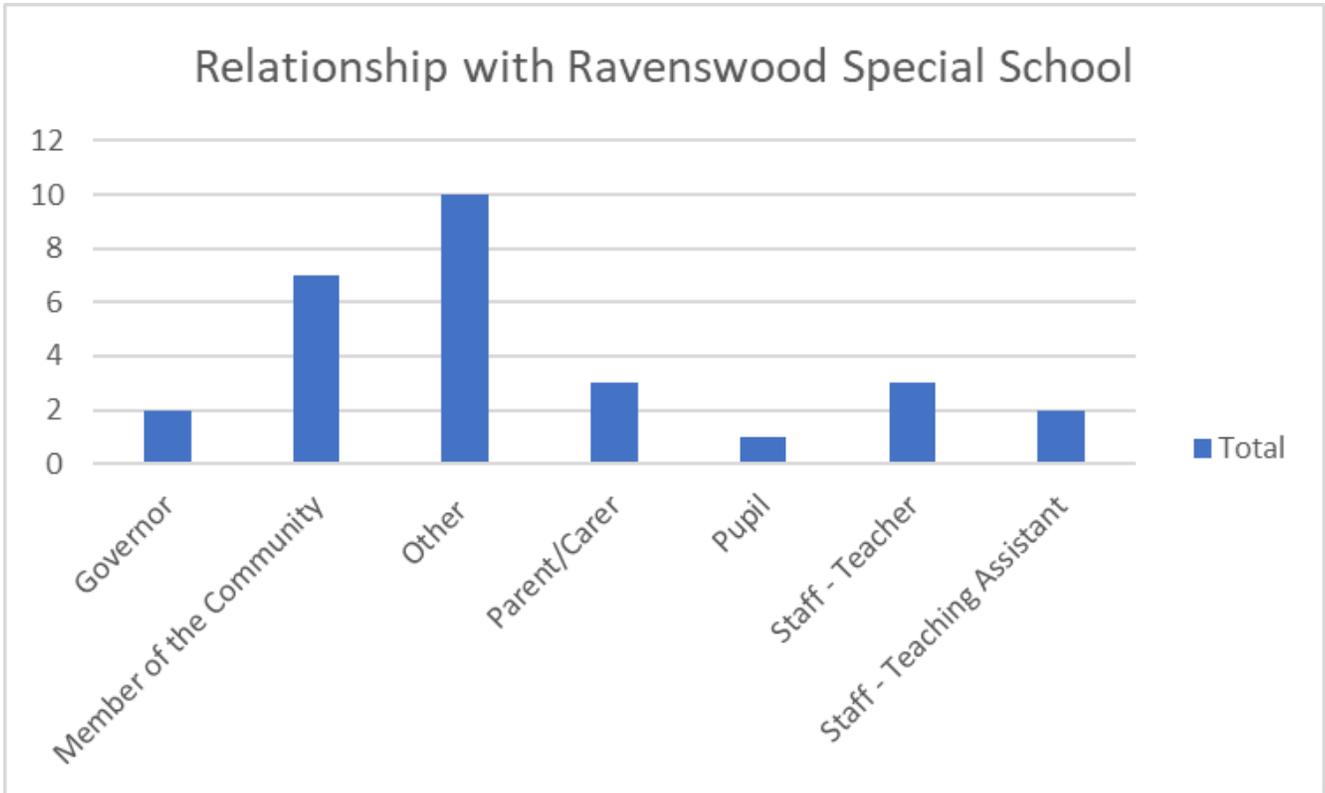
Signed.

Title: Director of Children’s Services

Date: 5.2.21

Footnote: Details of changes made and agreed by the decision taker since publication of the proposed (pre-signed) decision notice, if applicable:

Appendix 1



Summary of the responses to online consultation

Relationship with the school	Additional Information	Do you agree with the proposal	Additional Comments	Do you have concerns about equality impacts?	Additional comments
Governor		Yes		No	
Parent/Carer		Yes		No	
Member of the Community		No View	Firstly thank you Ravenwood		
Member of the Community		No View	Lovely idea. Must consider off road parking, double parked in the morning across driveway extremely busy fast road. Please use shrubs to cover fence so the young people have something natural to look out on. Parking is essential	No View	
Member of the Community		Yes	We desperately need increased number of SEND places in NS	No	
Other	Parish Councillor	Yes		No	
Pupil		Yes		Yes	
Parent/Carer		Yes	SEND provision is inadequate in North Somerset, so expansion is required. It seems entirely sensible that an already excellent school expand to meet this need (and with a much lower cost than a new school)	No	
Staff - Teacher		Yes		No	
Parent/Carer		No View	I know special needs placements are desperately needed but I feel that this is something that needs to be achieved by opening a new school not by expanding this one. Many of these children can't cope in loud busy environments, a huge advantage.	Yes	Of these schools is the small size, the more children the harder it becomes for them to cope. The less the space suits their needs a new school would be more beneficial & would prevent any children from no longer having their needs met.
Staff - Teacher		Yes		No	

Member of the Community		Yes		No	
Other	Somerset County Council	Yes	As a neighbouring LA, we welcome North Somerset's proposed investment in additional SEN places	No	
Staff - Teaching Assistant		Yes	It's great we can support more pupils. Having an extra building is not enough, we would need more staff, resources etc. I feel it is already difficult to give the best support to the children as there is such a lack of staffing, space and resources.	No	
Staff - Teaching Assistant		Yes		No	
Staff - Teacher		Yes	I think it's good that we could extend the school so we can help more pupils with SEND at Ravenswood. Although the buildings could do with lots of modernisation to ensure they are fit for purpose and prepared to ensure all pupils get the best outcomes	No	
Governor		Yes		No	
Member of the Community		Yes		No	
Other	Headteacher Portishead	Yes		No	
Member of the Community		Yes	This would be fantastic for the local and surrounding areas. It is hugely important that children receive the right and appropriate school placements to meet their needs.	No	
Other	SENCO from a local mainstream	Yes	North Somerset is desperate for more special school places	No	
Other	Peer special school response	Yes	These spaces are very much needed due to the high number of pupils needing a specialist education due to needs.	No	
Member of the Community		Yes		No	

Other	Mainstream FE College	Yes	<p>We support the consultation for Ravenswood school increase from 108 to 134 places from September 2021.</p> <p>However, to ensure that we are not duplicating provision within North Somerset and not putting additional pressure on the already overspent high needs budget, we support these additional places being made available for learners to access the Ravenswood school pre-16 provision. After attending the Zoom consultation meeting, information was provided to us that this allocation would be for those learners pre-16 in order to reduce the need for young people with SEND to access out of county specialist placements and post 16 place numbers would remain at 27.</p> <p>Please note as an organisation we remain committed to working in partnership to develop complementary educational pathways that effectively support young people of 16 years and above with SEND and their families to progress and transition into meaningful and happy adult lives. In this most challenging of times, it is important to acknowledge that much of the provision that North Somerset has developed in regards to transition and link programmes particularly with special schools is at risk and we will need to commit to work together to find innovative solutions that do not lose the momentum of this outstanding practice to ensure our most vulnerable young people and their families are not disadvantaged. In addition as one of three National SEND Centres for Excellence and a mainstream provider who successfully supports over 500 learners who are in receipt of high needs funding and over 1000 learners who are in receipt of some form of additional learning support, we are well placed to support North Somerset in further developing inclusive practice in mainstream, alternative and specialist provision.</p>	No	
Other	Parish Council	Yes	<p>Ravenswood School is an important provider of SEND education in North Somerset, including families in Portishead. Currently there are 16 children that travel to the school from Portishead, and the school have, this school year alone, already had 50 consults for only 18 available places, from the whole of North Somerset. Portishead Town</p>	No View	

			Council fully supports the school in its plans to expand the provision.		
Other	Town Council	Yes	Nailsea Town Council fully supports the expansion of Ravenswood School.	No View	
Other	Town Council	Yes	Nailsea Town Council fully supports the expansion of Ravenswood School.	No View	
Other	Yatton Parish Council	Yes	The answers were unanimous, and the Council were very much in support of the proposal.	No	

Appendix 2

Notes of the public meeting held on Zoom on Wednesday 9 December 2020 @ 17:00

Present:

Sally Varley (SV) – North Somerset Council
Mark Senior (MS)– Head Teacher Ravenswood School
Wendy Packer (WP)– North Somerset Council
Anthony Webster (AW) – North Somerset Council
Janice Allen (JA)– North Somerset Council
ME– Chair of Governors Ravenswood School
KW – Parent of a SEND child and Weston College
TS – Portishead Town Council
AB – Neighbour (joined the meeting at 17:15)

SV opened the meeting and welcomed everyone, and everybody then introduced themselves and their interest in the consultation.

MS gave an overview of the consultation, saying that the population of SEND is growing and there is a limited number of specialist places available for children. The VLC site next to the school is now vacant and there is an opportunity to increase the provision available at the school. Ravenswood is a good school and offers high quality education and they want to be able to offer this to more children. The whole of the school will benefit from this additional provision, with a proposed increase from 108 places to 140 places maximum, but more realistically 134 places.

WP then added that SEND numbers are not just growing in North Somerset, but the whole country and North Somerset is trying to respond to this proactively to facilitate local places in to a facility that has not previously been available and wants to be in a position to press forward with this expansion to benefit children and families.

Questions & Answers

SV then opened a question and answer session.

KW expressed concern that there may be a duplication of provision across North Somerset with Weston College in the post 16 provision being expanded. **MS** clarified the position and confirmed that Ravenswood already has post 16 provision with 27 spaces available and there is no current plan to increase this – when speaking about the increase to the whole school, he was referring to primary and secondary provision.

KW also asked for more information on whether the increases would be for set classes or where the need was. **MS** confirmed that the referrals made to the school were more than they could offer in terms of places available, but the increase in pupils would be in terms of a best fit to the facilities that they have and that they would need to ensure that the current cohort in the school were not adversely affected by the increase in provision. **AW** confirmed that SEND students were grouped in a class dependent upon their needs and that ages were mixed together, he likened it to putting a jigsaw together without a picture, so the best fit was achieved in terms of slotting them in. **AW** also confirmed that an EHCP gave an entitlement to education up until the age of 25 and that pupils staying at Ravenswood would most likely

to college when they leave Ravenswood and will continue with their education. **KW** confirmed that the concern was regarding a duplication on provision and that they don't want to duplicate what they do at college if they've already done it at school.

AB joined the meeting and was given an overview of what had already taken place. **AB** expressed concern over the safety of the road and appreciates that parking for staff is difficult, but often finds getting out of her drive hard on such a busy road and wondered if there was going to be any provision for additional parking or other measures in this respect. **SV** confirmed that as this expansion was taking over part of the VLC site, numbers of staff and pupils will make up for the numbers that have been lost through the relocation of this provision. As there is no physical expansion to the site, a planning application is not required, which would be the usual way in which parking would be addressed if increasing the site. The school does have a travel plan which is regularly reviewed, most of the children are brought to the school by Home to School Transport but the fact that Kingshill and the Early Years are all in the same vicinity adds to the problem.

AB confirmed that people from the school directing the minibuses does help the situation but wondered in the longer term whether there might be a better way of managing the traffic in and out of the school. She is concerned about the road traffic and safety and just wondered if there was anything better for the school. Very supportive of the proposal, but felt she needed to express concerns. **SV** said that she would pass those concerns to Highways colleagues as safety is a key consideration (but there were no known recent accidents in the area involving children) and also suggested that if **AB** has concerns in the future, she should pass those on to both the school and the integrated transport unit. **MS** confirmed that there were 82 staff at the school and only 20 parking spaces available and said that he and the Governors would look at the further to see whether anything else could be done in the future to mitigate this.

AB had one further comment that she wanted to bring up with regard to the public footpath along the side of the school and the bar fencing and wondered whether the school could do any fundraising to plant some nice shrubs along the edge of the fence so the children had something nice to look out on. **MS** invited **AB** to pop into the school with her name and phone number and he would put her in contact with the fund-raising team at the school.

There were no further questions – at 17:30 **SV** thanked everyone for joining the meeting and to make further contact with herself, **MS** or **JA** if they had any further observations or questions that they would like to raise, and if not already done, please respond to the online questionnaire.