

Woolwich Polytechnic School

Consultation on the expansion of DSP (Designated Specialist Provision) 10th March to 4th April 2025

Context

Pressures for special school and designated specialist provision (DSP) places continue to rise across the country. Within Royal Borough of Greenwich, the number of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) continues to rise steadily, particularly for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties and autism. Special Schools and current secondary DSPs in Royal Borough of Greenwich are at maximum capacity and there is currently a shortage of specialist places. The average cost of placing children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in an out of borough or private placement is £45k per place per year. This is in contrast to the current average £25k per place which can be provided in a local school. Therefore, investment to expand the DSPs and increase special provision will not only have a positive effect on the lives of children within the city, and the distance they travel to school, but will also positively reduce placement costs.

Response to meet SEND demand

Pupils with SEND have a broad range of needs that are not always aligned with a particular type of school structure. Therefore, the Royal Borough of Greenwich Local Authority (LA) needs to ensure there is a spectrum of provision across the City that effectively meets a diverse range of SEND needs. The LA has undertaken in depth analysis to look at the increasing profile of need across the city and has identified that one of the solutions is to expand the level of Designated Specialist Provision (DSP). These units allow children to still access a mainstream setting and can avoid the need to travel considerable distances to school. Over the last few years, the LA has encouraged Leicester schools to consider the creation of DSPs (and expansion of existing DSPs).

Woolwich Polytechnic School DSP capacity – proposed increase in number and gender

The DSP at Woolwich Polytechnic School (WPS) currently has 15 places for boys in Key Stage 3 and 4 with moderate learning difficulties and autism needs. Due to demand for places, it is proposed to increase capacity to 45 as follows:

15 boys (KS3/4) fully on WPS site

30 pupils (KS3/4) on a satellite site in Cookhill Road, 5 minutes from WPS

PolyMAT is required to consult on the proposed expansion of this DSP.

Background

Designated Special Provision (DSP) DSP is a model for offering a co-located specialist facility in a mainstream school which allows pupils with SEND who have needs which would normally be beyond the capacity of the mainstream environment to have those needs met whilst still being able to access a mainstream curriculum. The intention of a DSP is that pupils can still access some mainstream lessons but will also have the support of the DSP for certain aspects of their learning and for other needs. Many children with special needs can be successfully included into a mainstream school. Maintaining a place in a mainstream setting gives access to a broader curriculum for pupils with SEND and attainment is typically higher for pupils where this is an option. In addition, educating pupils with SEND alongside their peers in mainstream has significant benefits both for the pupils with SEND, who have access to the wider social life of the school, but also for the wider school community, as it creates a more diverse and inclusive culture. Special Schools provide a significant degree of specialism and intensity of provision to pupils with very high SEND. DSPs provide an environment for pupils with SEND for whom the combination of specialist support and access to the mainstream school provision is appropriate.

PolyMAT proposes to expand their DSP provision onto the satellite site as there is not sufficient space in the current provision at WPS. However, students on both sites will have the appropriate balance of bespoke support and curriculum alongside access to mainstream provision.

How do the DSP admissions work?

These go through the Royal Borough of Greenwich SEND Assessment and Review service so are open to pupils from all over the borough (and not just from the school where the DSP is located and not just from PolyMAT Trust).

How is the DSP funded? The LA provides the funds for the development of the unit and for the pupil places. So, no funding is diverted from the school's budget.