



Consultation on a proposal to change the designation of the specialist inclusion base at **Step gates Community School**



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Local authority details

Local Authority	Surrey County Council
Address	Woodhatch Place 11 Cockshot Hill Reigate Surrey RH2 8EF

School details

Name of School	Step gates Community School
Category of School	Primary
Type of School	Community
URN	125122
Address	Step gates, Chertsey
Postcode	KT16 8HT

Consultation on the proposal to change the designation of the specialist base at Stepgates Community School

Stepgates Community School is a one-form entry (1FE) primary school in the borough of Runnymede in Surrey. It currently has a 29 place specialist inclusion base with a designation of Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). The school was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in June 2023.

In agreement with the school's Headteacher and Governing Body, Surrey County Council (SCC) is proposing to change the designation of the specialist inclusion base at Stepgates Community School from Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Current pupils attending the specialist inclusion base will be unaffected by this change in designation. All pupils attending or applying to the provision will continue to require an EHCP specifying the specialist inclusion base as the appropriate placement to meet their individual needs and will be placed by the local authority, following the statutory process.

Background

Surrey context

Between 2026 and 2029, Surrey County Council anticipates continued growth in the number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) across all educational phases and settings. Surrey currently has the highest reliance on non-maintained independent (NMI) placements when compared with its statistical neighbours. The need to create additional specialist educational provision is driven by the requirement to reduce the number of children and young people who are without a suitable school place, who are required to travel significant distances, including outside of the county, or who are placed in higher-cost NMI settings.

On 24 February 2026, Surrey County Council approved the allocation of Surrey's 2025/26 High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA) Grant, totalling £16.14 million, to deliver projects that will create a minimum of 220 additional specialist places, including 123 places available from the 2026/27 academic year. At the same meeting, Cabinet endorsed the refocused SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Capital Programmes, with the aim of meeting immediate demand by increasing specialist capacity through partnership working with education settings to make effective use of latent accommodation within mainstream schools. The proposed establishment of a specialist base at Stepgates Community School was one of the projects approved for funding, subject to the relevant Cabinet Member decision.

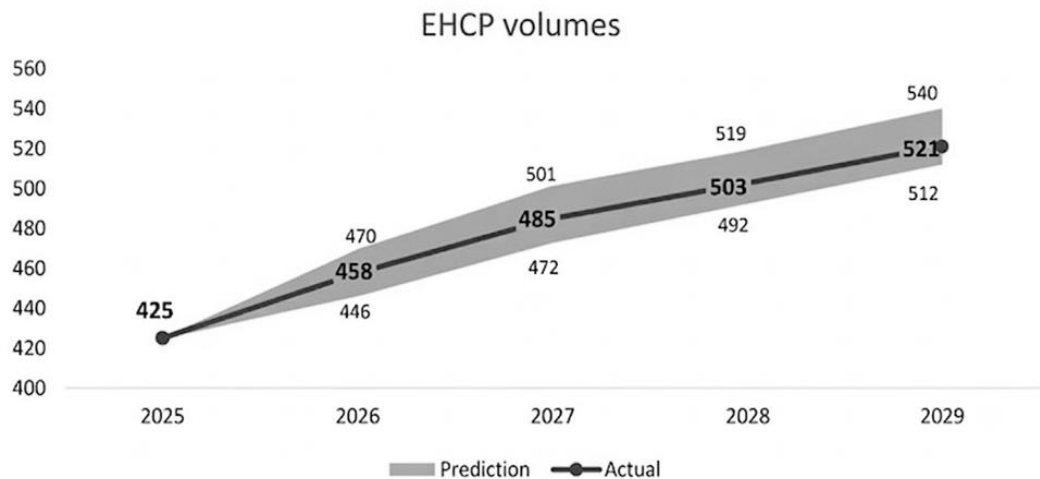
Despite significant capital investment in recent years, Surrey County Council continues to experience considerable pressures in meeting demand for specialist SEND provision. As of January 2026, the specialist education estate was operating above capacity, with maintained and academy special schools reporting occupancy levels more than 105%. National policy developments from the Department for Education (DfE) place increasing emphasis on inclusive practice and strengthening SEND capacity within mainstream schools, including the expansion of specialist provision where it already exists within these schools. The Government's SEND reform proposals, set out in '*SEND reform: putting children and young people first*' propose replacing the current terminology of SEN units,

resourced provisions and pupil support units with a new, consistent model of inclusion bases. This reflects the wider national ambition to improve inclusion and enable more children and young people with SEND to have their needs met within their local communities and mainstream settings wherever appropriate.

West Surrey context

Mid-range forecasts project that the number of pupils with an EHCP who need a place at a specialist base in a mainstream school in West Surrey is expected to rise by 23%, from 425 pupils in 2025 to 521 pupils in 2029. Of these, 45% of the pupils have Autism (ASD) recorded as the primary need in their EHCP.

Graph 1 – forecasted number of EHCPs in West Surrey from 2025 to 2029



Alongside this, it is predicted there will be a 16% increase in the number of pupils attending maintained specialist schools and a 33% increase in the reliance on non-maintained and independent schools. Creating additional specialist school places and establishing specialist inclusion bases in mainstream schools will seek to reduce the reliance on non-maintained and independent schools.

Stepgates Community School

Stepgates Community School is a one-form entry primary school with a specialist base, accommodating pupils aged 4 to 11. Table 2 shows the number of pupils on roll in each year group across the school including pupils attending the specialist base.

Table 2: Number of pupils on roll at Stepgates Community School by National Curriculum Year (NCY) group

	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
	33	33	32	34	32	35	34	233

Source: Stepgates Community School, September 2026

The specialist base at Stepgates Community School expanded from 21 places to 29 places in September 2023, including the delivery of a new bespoke accommodation for the base.

How would this re-designation proposal work?

This proposal is seeking to redesignate the provision already available at Stepgates Community School so that it would better reflect the needs of its current and emerging cohorts.

The main change involved in this proposal would be in relation to the way that pupil places are funded in the specialist inclusion base, rather than proposing any material changes to the number of places in or the practical setup of the provision currently offered.

Funding would reflect Stepgates Community School's transitional position from specialist SLCN provision to specialist ASD provision. Existing pupils currently on roll within the SLCN centre, and pupils placed before the approved change of designation would take effect, shall ordinarily be funded as SLCN centre placements. Pupils newly placed after approval of the significant change to ASD designation shall be funded as ASD centre placements under Surrey County Council's Mainstream Specialist Centre Funding Framework.

The change to funding is proposed from 3 February 2027 and new admissions for September 2027.

What does this proposal mean for children?

Over recent years, Stepgates Community School have seen a sustained increase in the number and complexity of pupils presenting with a primary need of autism. While many of these pupils also experience speech and language difficulties, their broader profile of need, particularly in relation to social communication, sensory processing, flexibility of thinking and emotional regulation, requires a more specialised and holistic provision reflected by the designation ASD. A formal diagnosis of autism would not be required for pupils to access this provision, as placement and support would be determined by an assessment of individual needs rather than a confirmed diagnosis, but a pupil must have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

The proposed change will enable the school to:

- provide a more targeted and consistent approach to teaching, learning and support
- develop specialist environments and strategies that are better aligned with autistic learners
- ensure staff expertise and training is focused on autism-specific approaches
- improve outcomes for pupils by matching provision more closely to their needs
- make it easier for families to identify provision that meets the needs of autistic pupils, when looking for a school place.

This redesignation reflects the school's commitment to evolving our provision in response to pupil needs, ensuring that all children are supported to access learning, develop independence and thrive within an inclusive school community.

What does this proposal mean for staff?

There are no changes proposed for staff at Stepgates Community School.

Would there be any changes to the school buildings?

As a new bespoke building was created in 2023 when the existing specialist inclusion base was expanded, there are no changes proposed to the accommodation as the current building is suitable for autistic pupils and those with communication and interaction needs.

What happens next?

This is a public consultation on the proposal to change the designation of the specialist inclusion base at Stepgates Community School from February 2027.

The consultation begins on Thursday 24th September and will end on Thursday 5th November 2026.

A virtual public engagement meeting will be held via Teams for families, local communities and any other interested parties to discuss and give feedback on the proposal. Anyone who wishes is welcome to attend the meeting, and you do not have to have a child at the school to attend.

The meeting will take place at Teams online on:

Thursday 15th October at 10am.

To register your interest, please email school.org@surreycc.gov.uk and you will be sent a link to the online event.

The council will consider all the views put forward during this consultation period before publishing specific proposals, or 'Statutory Notices', that are required by law. This is a further period for comments or representations, which lasts for 4 weeks during school term time, and a final decision would then be taken by Surrey County Council's Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning. The anticipated timeline for this proposal is shown in the table below (dates may be subject to change).

There are organisations also available locally to support families of children who have special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND) and young people who have SEND to share their views. Please see [Information, Advice and Support – SEND Advice Surrey](#).

Timeline

Phase	Date
Consultation on proposal	24 September to 6 November 2026
Public meeting held at the school	15 October 2026
A statutory notice is published for a 4-week term-time representation period	16 November to 11 December 2026
Responses to the consultation and Statutory Notices are considered by the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning and a final decision on the proposal is made	January 2027
Implementation of the proposal	3 February 2027

How do I respond to this consultation?

You can respond:

- Online at [SurreySays](https://www.surreysays.gov.uk)
- or

- by completing the consultation response form that is available alongside this document. You can either:
 - email the form to schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk
 - print it, complete it and send it back to:

Stepgates Community School SEND
Proposal
Education Place Planning
Woodhatch Place
11 Cockshot Hill
Reigate
RH2 8EF

All responses must be received by 5pm on Friday 6th November 2026.

If you have any questions about this proposal, please email schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk.