

Cabinet

Report Title	SEND Resource Provision: Ocker Hill Academy and Wood Green Academy
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 15 April 2026
Report Author	Sue Moore, Martyn Roberts
Lead Officer	Executive Director Children and Education
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Children & Families
Why is this a key decision?	To result in the Council incurring expenditure which exceeds that included in any approved revenue or capital budget or the limits set out within an approved borrowing or investment strategy and was not the subject of specific grant
Wards Affected	Wednesbury North; Wednesbury South;
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open
Is the report urgent?	No
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	Not Applicable
Appendices (if any)	N/A

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to allocate £1.66M from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocation grant funding reserve as a financial contribution towards the cost of delivering new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) resource provision projects at Ocker Hill Academy and Wood Green Academy

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Approve the allocation of £1,661,000 (inclusive of budget contingency) from the council's High Needs Provision Capital Allocation grant funding reserve for use as contributions to new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

(SEND) Resource Provision projects at Ocker Hill Academy, Gospel Oak Road, Tipton DY4 0DS, and Wood Green Academy, Wood Green Road, Wednesbury WS10 9QU.

- 2.2 Authorise, subject to the approval of recommendation 2.1, the Executive Director – Children and Education to confirm to the Department for Education that the council will provide the approved match funding to the School Rebuild Programme of:

Ocker Hill Academy - £400,000
Wood Green Academy - £1,110,000

- 2.3 Authority be granted that in relation to the remaining balance of £151,000 from the approved allocation of £1.66m, the funding be retained as a 10% budget contingency until the Department for Education confirms the council's final total capital contribution to each capital project at Ocker Hill Academy and Wood Green Academy.
- 2.4 Subject the approval of recommendations 2.1 – 2.3, delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director – Children and Education, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, Service Director – Governance to enter into a funding agreement(s) with the Department for Education to complete the capital contributions to the School Rebuild Programme.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

- 3.1 The Department for Education (DfE) has allocated additional capital funding, High Needs Provision Capital Allocation (HNPCA), to Local Authorities to support the creation and improvement of educational provisions for children with SEND. HNPCA is designed to assist local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties to provide sufficient school places and improve the quality of educational facilities with SEND.
- 3.2 Both Ocker Hill Academy and Wood Green Academy have been included within the DfE's national School Rebuild Programme which will see both school sites comprehensively redeveloped.
- 3.3 Ocker Hill Academy operates as a 240 place (two-form entry) junior school, and has a well-established Resource Provision supporting up to 10 pupils with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health needs (SEMH).
- 3.4 Wood Green Academy, a 1,300 place, 11-16 secondary school plus sixth form does not have a designated SEND Resource Provision but does provide wider support to its pupils who require additional support to meet their needs.
- 3.5 For each Academy the DfE has welcomed the school / Local Authority aspiration to expand and enhance resource provision at Ocker Hill, and provide new places at Wood Green as part of the redevelopment proposals. 5. additional SEND places will be provided at Ocker Hill, and 20 new places at Wood Green. Both Academies are in full support of the proposals.

- 3.6 New places at each Academy supports the Council's strategic vision of enabling children and young people with SEND to go to school close to home and within their communities.
- 3.7 The DfE is at the planning and design stage for each scheme, however until it has awarded its building contract for the proposed works, the final cost for the council's capital contribution to provide the new SEND facilities can only be provided on an indicative basis. The Department has requested the council to confirm that the financial contributions will be made, and therefore a contingency of 10% has been applied to the HNPCA allocation to provide for any additional rise in the final cost. To protect the council's financial position and reduce any risk it is proposed to enter into a funding agreement with the DfE with regards to the capital contributions.
- 3.8 The School Rebuild Programme is directly funded, managed and procured by the DfE. The Academies have been included in the programme based upon the DfE's condition assessments. Wood Green Academy is the only school in the borough to be identified as having RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) in one of its teaching blocks. The DfE have decided to replace a large proportion of the school with latest plans to retain the original Boys High School. An indicative delivery programme is awaited from the DfE.
- 3.9 At Ocker Hill Academy the current Resource Provision is accommodated within the converted former Site Manager's house. The house was not included in the DfE's scope to replace as its programme does not focus on former school dwellings. With the council's contribution the Resource Provision can be maintained onsite and increased in capacity from 10 to 15 places to provide much needed SEND places.
- 3.10 In line with the Council's proposed Locality Model, new provision at Wood Green Academy will be incorporated within the overall school footprint providing discreet support facilities alongside mainstream teaching areas.
- 3.11 Whilst current data indicates a high level of need in the coming years to support children with SEMH needs, facilities within new and existing Resource Provisions will be multi-functional to adapt to the changing needs of children and young people.

4. Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The School Rebuild Programme is directly funded, managed and procured by the DfE and in the circumstances there are limited alternative options available. However, the Authority does not wish to miss the opportunity to include specialist places in a new build project. The following alternative options have been considered in respect of both schools –

Ocker Hill Academy

- 4.2 **Option 1: allow the school replacement project to proceed without additional provision being provided.** The current school buildings are very restrictive with limited ancillary spaces to provide for the withdrawal of mainstream pupils with SEND. To provide support for those pupils has presented challenges for the school for many years hence conversion of the former Site Manager's house upon its vacation.

The option is dismissed as a like for like replacement of the existing Resource Provision offers no ability to expand capacity in the SEND sector at a time when there is significant pressure for places.

- 4.3 **Option 2: provide additional places at an alternative local primary school.** The SEND Locality Model will expect all schools to provide for inclusivity on a tiered approach. No local school to Ocker Hill Academy provides a similar Resource Provision with the knowledge and staff skill to support the additional specialist places that the Academy can offer. The option is dismissed on the basis of the timeliness and adaptability the Academy can make to admit extra pupils with SEND given the pressure for appropriate local school places.

Wood Green Academy

- 4.4 **Option 1: allow the school replacement project to proceed without additional provision being provided.**

The option would have been a lost opportunity to provide Resource Provision at an oversubscribed and popular secondary school. Whilst the new school buildings would be fully accessible it would not provide the teaching and learning facilities that a new Resource Provision will provide. The option is dismissed as it would not provide much needed SEND places at a time of increased demand.

- 4.5 **Option 2: provide additional places at an alternative local secondary school.**

There are 2 alternative secondary schools in the Wednesbury area, Wodensborough Ormiston Academy has a longstanding and established Resource Provision to support pupils diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Condition, or experience Hearing Loss. Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School is a smaller secondary school with limited capacity to provide a Resource Provision for 20 no. pupils. New places to support pupils with SEMH are required particularly in the Wednesbury area so this option is dismissed given the opportunity to develop a new facility at Wood Green which is recommended for approval within this report.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Through the Head Teacher Reference Group, Head Teacher Partnership Meetings, and consultative SEND groups with external partner agencies, significant consultation continues in connection with the introduction of the SEND Locality Model, which will address the provision of local SEND school places in local communities. Consideration of the model is driven by the Local Authority's draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2026-2029 which has identified shortfalls in provision for pupils with SEND, particularly in Tipton and Wednesbury schools.
- 5.2 Ocker Hill Academy: the proposed increase in Resource Provision places does not meet the DfE's threshold requiring a formal consultation exercise to be completed.
- 5.3 Wood Green Academy: the new provision at the Academy is considered by the DfE to be a significant change for an Academy which will require a formal consultation led by the Academy Trust, once the Department has confirmed

the project details. The Academy Trust will need to consult with all stakeholders, including Sandwell schools, local ward representatives, M.P.'s, neighbouring local authorities and Diocesan Boards.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 The Local Authority's financial contribution to the DfE's School Rebuild Programme to provide Resource Provision at the Academies will be met from its HNPCA allocation.

6.2 Following Cabinet approval on 14 January 2026 (Decision No.14/26 (1)) which allocated £1.64m of the funding to provide new Resource Provision at Causeway Green Primary School, a balance of £11.168m approximately remains for the grant allocation. The grant is not time limited but there is the condition that the funding must be used to support the creation and improvement of educational provisions for children with SEND.

6.3 The DfE has provided the following indicative budgets for the project at Ocker Hill Academy to expand provision, and for a new Resource Provision at Wood Green Academy. As the DfE is currently unable to confirm final costs an additional 10% budget contingency has been set aside within the proposed allocation:

Academy	HNPCA Contribution (£)	Inclusive of Contingency (£)
Ocker Hill Academy	400,000	440,000
Wood Green Academy	1,110,000	1,221,000
Total Allocation		1,661,000

6.4 Following final cost confirmation from the DfE any unspent funding from the allocation would be retained within the HNPCA reserve to support future projects.

6.5 The Section 151 Officer has received and considered a summary report with supporting evidence with regards to the creation of these new SEND places. It has been confirmed that the average annual saving per SEND space that can be achieved by internal provision is £27.481k per year. When this is applied to the number of additional spaces that can be delivered at both Ocker Hill and Wood Green Academies then a total saving of £687.025k per year can be achieved. These savings generate a potential pay back of the full cost over 2.42 years and a rate of return of 3.74 over 10 years and 14.08 over 25 years.

Average Annual Cost Per Pupil		
Independent Provision (Out of Borough)	1	44,302.00
Community Provision (Internal)	1	16,821.00
Saving (Internal Provision)		27,481.00

Annual Savings:		
Ocker Hill (5 Additional Spaces)	5	137,405.00
Wood Green (20 Additional Spaces)	20	549,620.00
Total Annual Savings		687,025.00

- 6.6 Based upon the DfE's current procurement and delivery programmes it is anticipated that the funds will need to be released later in 2026/27, or 2027/28.
- 6.7 There are no revenue implications for the council. As an Academy, both schools receive their delegated budget directly from the DfE. The Academies will be responsible for the ongoing staffing and general maintenance and upkeep of the new Resource Provisions.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 S.14 of the Education Act (1996) places statutory obligations on the council to ensure that there are sufficient school places to meet the needs of all children and young people (CYP) within the borough. This includes ensuring appropriate and high-quality provision for those with SEND.
- 7.2 The Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice 0–25 (2015), state that all children and young people are entitled to an education that is suited to their needs, promotes high standards, and supports the fulfilment of their potential.
- 7.3 The schools are academies with a long leasehold interest granted for each site to the respective Academy Trust. The freehold ownership of the land will remain with the local authority. Governance arrangements for the schools will remain the same.

8. Risks

- 8.1 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision / project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.
- 8.2 Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that for the significant risks that have been identified, arrangements are in place to manage and mitigate these effectively.
- 8.3 If this report is not agreed, then the council will risk the potential of having insufficient school places for pupils with SEND. Further, the council will continue to incur additional expenditure to source independent school places out-of-borough due to the shortfall of places in our local schools.
- 8.4 If the report is approved there is a risk of higher prices when the DfE appoints a constructor(s) to undertake the projects. To manage the impact a budget contingency has been applied to the optimum costs provided, and the Local Authority would review the original scope of works to ensure that value for money will continue to be provided.

- 9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)**
- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed on the recommended decisions to Cabinet. There were no negative or adverse impacts identified in relation to the recommended decisions being taken.
- 9.2 The EqIA identified the positive impacts being that both projects are a like for like replacement of the existing schools. In addition, the expansion / inclusion of a new, purpose-built Resource Provision for SEND pupils will further enhance the new school environments providing full opportunities for inclusion of all pupils, irrespective of their particular characteristics.
- 10. Other Relevant Implications**
- 10.1 **Health and Wellbeing** - New replacement school facilities will be a positive impact for children and young people as they will ensure that poor condition elements of the school assets are replaced.
- 10.2 **Social Value** - The new school buildings will improve the school environment for children / young people and provide opportunity for use of the facilities by the local community.
- 10.3 **Climate Change** - The replacement schools will be based upon the DfE's design principles for new schools. Design bulletin's published by the DfE encourage all responsible bodies for educational settings to meet minimum specifications and industry standards. Project support from the council will ensure that lessons learnt from the Local Authority's own School Capital Programme are reflected within the new designs to ensure the new buildings are carbon neutral / ready for carbon neutrality.
- 10.4 **Corporate Parenting** - The new replacement school buildings will enhance and improve the teaching environments for all, extending the councils, and its partner schools, primary provision for SEND children through the inclusion of new Resource Provision, enabling children to attend their local school.
- 10.5 **Procurement Implications** – there are no direct procurement implications with the proposed course of action recommended to Cabinet. Procurement of the project will be conducted directly by the DfE. In making the financial contribution to each scheme officers will ensure that appropriate procurement measures are evidenced by the DfE to ensure transparency and value for money for the council.
- 10.6 **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** - The Council has a duty under s.17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 to consider the impact, direct or indirect, that their work may have on crime and disorder, and community safety. There are

no crime or disorder implications envisaged with the proposed report recommendations.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 Draft Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Sufficiency Strategy 2026 – 2029

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

- 12.1 The proposals in the report will support delivery against the following objectives:
- **Growing up in Sandwell** - we will provide enough good school places that offer families choice and confidence that their children can experience high quality education and achieve good outcomes.