



Cheshire West
and Chester

**Free school presumption:
Specification for proposers wishing
to establish a new primary school for
Ledsham Garden Village, Ledsham
Road, Ellesmere Port.**

June 2026

Section A - Introduction

Cheshire West and Chester Council, referred to as 'the Council', has a statutory duty to provide a school place for every school age child living in the Borough. To ensure the Council meets its statutory duty, officers monitor pupil forecasts along with any planned new housing developments to ensure that it can identify when there is the need to provide additional school places and to respond in a timely manner.

The Education and Inspectors Act 2006 also require local authorities to adopt a strategic role, with a duty to promote choice, diversity, and fair access to school provision. The Department for Education have very recently (on 18 May 2026) published new guidance for opening new schools: [Opening new schools - GOV.UK](#). However, as The Council had already conducted the consultation for this particular proposal and published the specification before 1 September 2026, the proposal will progress through the [Establishing a new academy 4 free school presumption - GOV.UK](#) route as set out by the Department. The consultation assisted in formulating the draft specification of the Free School. Academy Sponsors are invited to bid to run the Free school. The selected Academy sponsor will be responsible for holding the formal consultation.

The local authority has a statutory duty to ensure the availability of sufficient early years places for all three- and four-year-olds, as well as eligible children aged 9 months to 3 years. A significant proportion of early education and childcare in Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) is provided through the private and voluntary sector. However, the local authority works with and supports all types of providers in order to meet its statutory duty, and this includes schools. The Council holds important contextual information on the requirement for places locally and must be consulted in all cases.

The [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (EYFS), sets the standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to five (group and school-based providers) It is important to note the revised statutory information regarding ratios for free schools/academies, health, nutrition, safe eating and sleep.

The free school will adhere to the Cheshire West and Chester Contract for the Provision of Early Years Entitlements which aligns with the delivery requirements outlined in the [Statutory Guidance for Early Education and Childcare](#). The free school will consult with the local community to confirm access to funded hours in nursery supports a majority of local family's needs, whilst also ensuring the hours offered are not too flexible to disrupt the wellbeing and involvement of children in attendance. (Please contact CW&C Early Years Team for further guidance and/ or refer to [Cheshire West Livewell](#) and the governments [Best Start in Life](#) website for further information on early years funding.

In December 2025, the Department for Education launched plans to create specialist teaching spaces in mainstream schools equipped with facilities to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. The approach creates inclusivity designed to provide local provision.

Following the progress of the housing development on Ledsham Road, also known as Ledsham Garden Village, Ellesmere Port in the Ellesmere Port West Planning Area, the Council has identified an increased need in primary school places and seeks to establish a new 1.5 form entry (FE) 315 place, mainstream, mixed primary free school with a SEN Unit

for 10 places for communication and interaction support (including Autism and complex speech, language and communication needs) and a 26 place nursery, for ages 3 to 11. It is proposed the new school and nursery would open at the earliest in September 2028.

A consultation on the proposal to create a new primary school provision within the Ellesmere Port West planning area was carried out between 6 November to 17 December 2023. And a second round of consultation was carried out between 27 April 2026 to 25 May 2026. The consultation was distributed to all key stakeholders. It was also published on the council's website. Feedback received through the consultation was used to develop the free school specification.

The presumption process is an option by which local authorities can establish new schools in order to meet the need for additional places, both in terms of basic need and the need for diverse provision within their areas. The presumption process can be used to deliver all types of schools and local authorities are responsible for determining the specification for the new school and will lead and implement the project to establish the school.

The Department for Education provides support and advice to local authorities and sponsors throughout the process and will appoint a lead contact for the project to assist the local authority and successful sponsor in its delivery. The presumption process sits alongside the DfE's central mainstream free schools programme where applications are made direct to the DfE.

The school building will be built in two phases, the first being a 1 FE (210 place) building with the ancillary spaces (such as hall, kitchen, dining etc) for a 1.5 form entry/315 pupil place school, to open September 2028. The second phase will then proceed at the point in which pupil numbers determine it, this will add on the additional accommodation for the additional 0.5 form entry, 105 pupils.

The new school will be located within the Ledsham Garden Village development. The school will primarily serve the families on that new development. It is planned, based on current forecasting, that the new school will open in September 2028 initially at 0.5FE with a restricted PAN of 15 places offered in Reception, 15 places in Year 1 and 15 places in Year 2. The school will then build up to a capacity of 210 primary places and then, as the housing development progresses and demand increases, a capacity of 315 primary places.

The SEN Unit will on the first year of opening offer 5 places across Reception to year 2 and on the second year will increase by a further 5 places upto year 6 - providing a total of 10 SEN places.

The nursery will initially have limited intake at 13 places upon opening and will increase in-line with growth.

The new school, SEN Unit and nursery are currently in design. The presumption process will run concurrently with the planning permission process; therefore, the successful academy trust will not have the opportunity to influence the design of the new school.

The Council welcomes proposals from all potential academy trusts.

Evidence of Need

The Ledsham Garden Village development in Ellesmere Port West planning area, comprises of up to 2,000 new dwellings. This development was identified in the Cheshire West & Chester Local Plan, which was adopted in 2015 and leads additional development up to 2030. The strategic development site at Ledsham Road includes provision of a new Primary School with SEN unit and nursery.

The development commenced in 2016 and is expected to be approaching completion of approx. 680 dwellings. The total number of primary children expected from the development is 368 pupils. Strategic housing developments forecast annual build rates, to which we apply forecast annual pupils expected. The actual dwellings that are occupied and the children that arise from them can fluctuate. The Council continually monitors children arising from new housing. It must be noted, larger developments can take many years to build out, and in some cases, this will be driven by the economy. Building a school in stages will assist in managing the places needed at the time, whilst ensuring the sustainability of existing schools.

Latest housing monitor data below provides forecasts of pupils expected from new dwellings. Pupil forecasts measured against schools in the planning area expect a small deficit of primary places for 2027, which then increases year in year.

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
No. dwellings	56	101	67	72	81
No. of primary pupils	12	22	15	16	18
Cumulative No. of primary pupils	12	34	49	65	83

Based on forecast need and the timeline to deliver a new School, it is anticipated that the new school will be required to open September 2028. The projected primary school places required are pupil yields that were used at the time of assessing the outline application. The Department for Education (DfE) has worked with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to develop a recommended methodology for estimating pupil yield from housing development, to assist local authorities demonstrating the need for education facilities during local plan preparation and the consideration of planning applications, further details can be found [here](#).

To help understand the area further, the Department for Education's "Find and compare schools in England" website provides data on primary performance (2019), Ofsted ratings, absence, pupil population, workforce and finance within a one- and three-mile radius. Based on the approximate school site, there are five schools within a one-mile radius. There is a total of 30 schools within a three mile radius of the site (Appendix 1) and further information can be found on the [Government website](#).

The map below shows the position of the existing primary schools in the Ellesmere Port West Planning Area and the location of the Ledsham Garden Village housing development (area shaded grey):



The secondary school catchment for the area is split between The Whitby High School, Ellesmere Port, and Ellesmere Port CofE College

Free School Presumption Process

Proposers should complete the “model application form for proposers” in [Annex B of the DfE’s free school presumption guidance](#) (or Appendix 4)

Free school Presumption Timetable	
Stage 1 – Invitation for Proposals	
Council publish specification: National and local announcements using Department for Education (DfE) and Cheshire West and Chester Council websites	8 June 2026
Closing date for applications	3 August 2026
Stage 2 - Assessment	
Council informs DfE of all proposals received	Early August 2026
Council assesses proposals using DfE criteria	August / September 2026
Assessment panel of shortlisted proposers	September / October 2026
Recommendation to Cheshire West and Chester Cabinet Member for Children and Families and confirmation of preferred sponsor.	November 2026
Council assessment and preferred sponsor submitted to the Regional Director, for the North-West for consideration and decision	Spring Term 2027
Stage 3 - Decision	
The Regional Director (RD) for the North-West (for the Secretary	No specified timescale

of State) will consider the Councils assessments and recommendations and decide which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school. The RD will inform the Council and the successful proposer of the decision, and the Council will inform unsuccessful proposers.	
New school opens	1 September 2028 (subject to the building project)

Applications will be assessed using the “model criteria for local authorities and proposers” in [Annex C of the DfE’s free school presumption guidance](#) (or Appendix 5) plus the council’s additional criteria, shown below in this specification.

The application form and associated documents can be found on Cheshire West and Chester Council’s website:
[Ledsham Road Free School Presumption | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

Completed forms should be returned to SchoolOrganisationandConsultations@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk no later than Midnight 3 August 2026, applications received after this time will not be considered. If you would like further information or wish to discuss your application, please contact Vikki Williams, School Organisation and Transport Policy Manager – Vikki.williams@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk or Janine Smart, School Admissions and Capital Development Manager – Janine.smart@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

NB: the local authority led free school presumption is a different route to the DfE’s free school programme. Further information about how to establish a new school via the DfE’s free school programme route can be found at:
[Establishing a new academy: free school presumption - GOV.UK](#)

Section B - The School

Opening date

The new school is planned to open in September 2028. However, trusts should be aware that this date is subject to review. Pupil place demand and build out rates will continue to be reviewed regularly alongside securing ownership of the school site, any one of these factors may identify the need for the school to open on an alternative date.

School size and age range

The school’s capacity will be planned at 315 places. The school building will be built in two phases, the first being a 1 FE (210 place) school, to open September 2028. The second phase will then proceed at the point in which pupil numbers determine it, this will add on the additional accommodation for the additional 0.5 form entry, 105 pupils. The Council will want to work with the academy trust to balance the availability of places against local demand. This will require a flexible approach based on the pace of house building in the area. We anticipate that the new school will open initially with 15 places in Reception, Year 1 and 2. The school will then build up to a capacity of 210 primary places and then, as the housing development progresses and demand increases, a capacity of 315 primary places

Academy Trusts will need to work with the Council to manage the availability of places, to ensure that the new school does not impact on surrounding schools and ensure that children moving onto the development can access a place. This arrangement will be reviewed with Cheshire West and Chester Council prior to the school opening, subject to demand for primary school places from the development.

The school will accommodate mixed genders and will be expected to accommodate children aged 3-11 years. The school will have pre-school provision of 26 places. The early years provision will initially open with 13 places and build up in line with the increased capacity of the whole school.

For further information around early years please see Appendix 2

Support for vulnerable learners and those with special educational needs and/or disability

The new school must provide a fully inclusive learning environment in which all pupils, including those with special or additional educational needs and those with disabilities, are supported and enabled to make appropriate progress. The needs of vulnerable children and young people should be met locally wherever possible. The new school should have a strong focus on equalities, early intervention, and supporting the needs of the local community.

In line with the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice (2014), schools must ensure all children and young people have access to a broad, balanced and appropriate curriculum that is inclusive of those with SEND. Additionally, as part of The Equality Act (2010) any reasonable adjustments to support children and young people with disabilities (whether of a physical, educational or mental health nature) to access the same provision as others should be made.

Our vision in Cheshire West and Chester is to support children, young people with SEND and their families to have inclusive opportunities, to have their needs met at the right place at the right time and ensure they are happy, healthy and safe.

It is our commitment that children, young people, and their families' voices are heard and listened to.

The Council has identified the need for a 10 place SEND provision, supporting children with communication and Interaction.

The school would be responsible for the quality and outcomes of the provision. Admissions for the Unit would be managed by the Council's SEND team. Trusts cannot be the admissions authority.

Please Note: This reflects current legislative requirements, national policy, and local commissioning priorities at the time of publication. The Government's ongoing SEND Reforms and the commitments set out in Every Child Achieving and Thriving White Paper (2026) are expected to bring further changes to the structure, expectations and operation of specialist and inclusive provision across England. As these reforms progress, it may be necessary to update elements of this specification to ensure continued compliance with statutory duties and alignment with emerging national frameworks.

For further information related to the SEND provision please see Appendix 3.

School location and context

The location of the new school is central in the development and can be seen below (for illustrative purposes):



The school will be situated within the Ledsham Garden Village development and will primarily serve families residing in this area. The site is a 1.32 Hectare plot accessed off Kellerman Road, which acts as a spine road for this part of the Garden Village, linking to Leamington Road and Historian Way which serve the development off Ledsham Road to the north.

Planning Conditions

School Community Use

Academy trusts must ensure that the school plays a key role within its immediate community and the wider local area. The school will be expected to provide access to its facilities for community groups, as appropriate and in accordance with agreed safeguarding and security arrangements, in line with the following planning condition:

Prior to the occupation or first use of the school, a Community Use Policy shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The Community Use Policy shall set out arrangements to ensure that the indoor and outdoor sports and

recreational facilities provided as part of the school premises are made available for community use. The Policy shall include details of the pricing structure, hours of use, access arrangements for non-educational users, and management and operational procedures. The school and its facilities shall not be used at any time other than in full accordance with the approved Community Use Policy.

School Travel Plan

A School Travel Plan is required to promote sustainable travel choices, reduce reliance on the private car, minimise traffic impacts, address road safety issues, and improve air quality.

Within six months following the first occupation of the school, a School Travel Plan shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval in writing. The School Travel Plan shall set out proposals including, but not limited to, the appointment of a Travel Plan Coordinator, targets, phasing arrangements, a timetable for implementation, and enforcement mechanisms if targets are not met. The School Travel Plan shall also include arrangements for monitoring and periodic review. The approved School Travel Plan shall be implemented and maintained for the lifetime of the school while it remains in use.

Informative – Water Supply Infrastructure Responsibility

It is noted that United Utilities is responsible for water supply infrastructure only up to the site boundary. All internal or private water supply pipework beyond this point will be the responsibility of the school, including its maintenance and any necessary repairs.

Admission to school

Academy trusts must have oversubscription criteria that are reasonable, clear, objective, procedurally fair and which comply with all relevant legislation. The successful academy trust will be required to follow the DfE School Admissions Code.

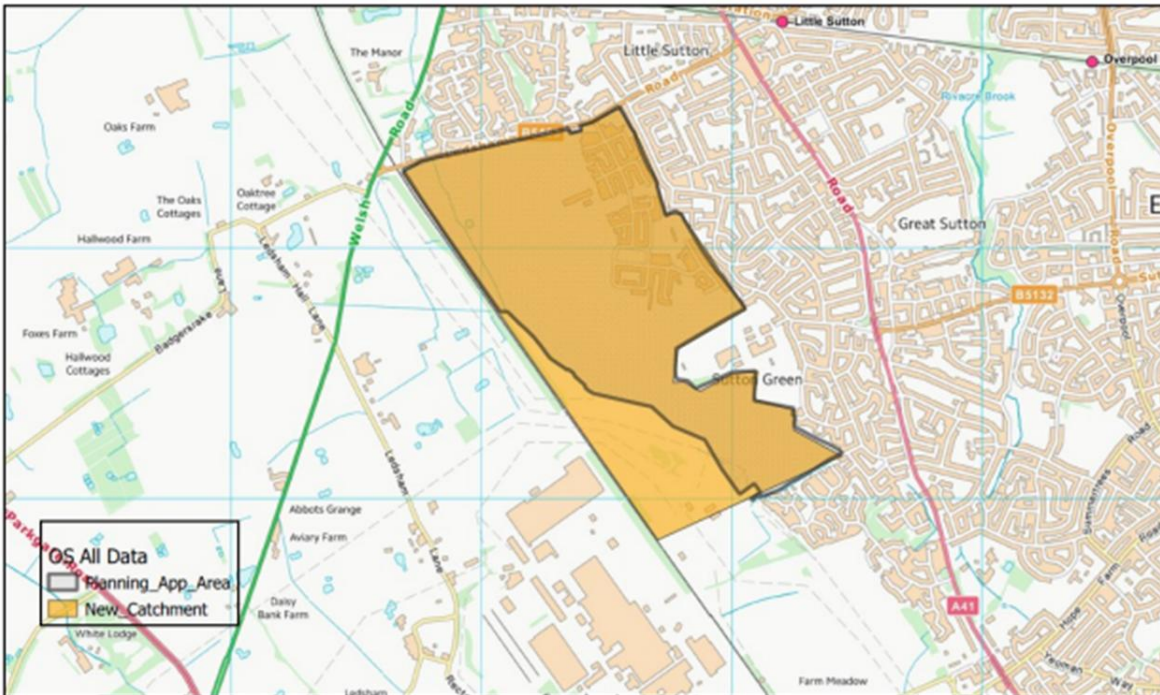
The successful academy trust will also be required to participate in the Council's co-ordinated scheme for the normal admissions rounds. They will also have to follow the Council's In-year Fair Access procedure.

Admission arrangements, which may include a catchment area for the new primary free school, would ultimately be decided by the successful Trust. The Council will however strongly expect a collaborative approach when determining these arrangements in order to ensure cohesion and sustainability of the local primary school economy and that any proposed arrangements reflect local needs.

A school's catchment area is a defined area which has been determined for the school to serve. The Council is proposing to establish a new catchment area for the new school. The proposed catchment area for the new school is within an area at the development at Ledsham Garden Village. This area currently overlaps school catchment areas for Sutton Green Primary and Capenhurst Primary. The proposed new catchment area for the new school at Ledsham Garden Village will be to serve the new development only, however the existing school catchment areas for Sutton Green Primary and Capenhurst Primary will remain and will become shared catchment areas for the new school.

The proposed catchment area will also share the current Parish Boundary for St Saviour's Catholic Primary School, which is the school's defined Catchment Area as determined through their School Admission.

Proposed catchment area for the new school:



The oversubscription criteria must reflect the fact that the school will open, principally, to serve families on the Ledsham Garden Village development site in Ellesmere Port West. Information about the capacity and distance of existing local primary and secondary schools within a 2 and 3-mile radius of the development are set out in Appendix 1.

Home-to-School Travel

Information regarding the council's Home to School Transport Policy and accompanying documents can be found at: [School transport | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#)

The successful academy trust will be expected to produce a School Travel Plan, which is a Condition of the planning approval. The new academy will be expected to encourage safe and sustainable travel to and from school. The successful academy trust will be expected to work with neighbouring schools when agreeing the timing of the school day and professional development dates to enable efficient use of school and commercial transport. Whilst the normal statutory entitlement and the council's home to school transport policies will apply, there is no expectation that the council would provide free transport to the free school as a matter of course. As usual, parental parking will not be provided at the school, and the school travel plan must reflect upon mitigation of the impact on local residents.

Working in Partnership

A key component of selection will be the academy trust's willingness to work in collaboration with other providers and local partners to develop services which meet the needs of local children, young people and families in a coordinated way. The successful academy trust will be expected to liaise with local high schools to plan effective pupil transition. The successful academy trust will also be expected to support the strategic responsibilities of the Council to ensure sufficiency of high-quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information. The successful academy trust will also be expected to work with the Council to manage the Published Admission Number (PAN) whilst the school grows, which will include limiting the PAN throughout the growth of the school to ensure that places are available to children on the new development.

Section C - Vision

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance.

- As a minimum, please ensure you include the following:
- A strong educational vision and a curriculum delivery based on high standards of attainment for each key stage,
- Plans for appropriate engagement with the local community and parents during the pre-opening period and any on-going engagement,
- Excellent support facilities to meet the needs of all children, including looked after children, those with Special Educational Needs, etc
- A commitment to excellent outcomes and high quality of teaching and learning
- Evidence of commitment to contribute to the cohesion and sustainability of the local primary school economy.
- Evidence of commitment to the Council's declared Climate and Poverty
- Emergencies within the school setting

Section D - Education Plan

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance.

As a minimum please ensure you include the following:

- An ambitious, broad and balanced, deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake. This could include a curriculum table and pupil build up chart
- Strategies for measuring pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets
- A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels; with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective performance management). This could also include an organogram and staff build up chart
- The needs of all children are fully provided for and how the school will be fully inclusive
- Details of enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs
- The school's approach to: PHSE; the Prevent Duty; safeguarding and welfare; and promoting fundamental British values (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs)
- Details of how the school will facilitate independent travel as part of the Year 6 to Year 7 transition.

Section E - Capacity and Capability

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance.

As a minimum please ensure you include the following:

- The resources you would draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new free school by the opening date
- Clear evidence that you have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including: managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety
- How the school would be organised and what the governance arrangements would

look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures

Section F - Funding and Costs

Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance

Please provide;

1. Most recent set of Trust accounts
2. Financial forecast for the next 3 years which would include at a summary level:

Pupil number projections (in conjunction with Council info)

Income projections GAG funding and other income streams such as other grants and income from services

High Needs Block funding

Early Years funding

Staff costs

Premises costs

Education and Learning Resources

Supplies and Services

Capital Funding

To accommodate the additional children generated by development in the area, developer contributions have been secured to provide a suitable site and funding towards the new school on the development site. The capital costs of the new school will be fully funded, from a combination of developer contributions and council capital funds.

Lease Arrangements

The site will be made available to the agreed academy provider on a 125-year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the 2010 Academies Act.

Other Allowances

Pre-opening

Project Development Grant (PDG) - The DfE provides a one-off grant of £25,000 to the successful proposer for legal expenses associated with establishing a new free school through the Free School Presumption route.

The Council will provide the following funding:

A one-off start-up allowance of £110,000 - to allocate as appropriate to cover costs such as the employment of a Headteacher and administrative support in advance of the school opening.

Resources: calculated as £7,000 per 30 places created (excluding nursery). For example, a 1-FE 210-place primary school would create 210 places and receive a total of £49,000 paid over the first three years, i.e., £17,000 in the year of opening, £16,000 in the 2nd and in the 3rd year of opening.

Diseconomies of Scale and Financial Viability: in the four years after opening, an amount would be paid annually based on the number of “empty cohorts” due to year groups being

admitted incrementally. The amount would depend on how many year groups with pupils aged 5-11 were empty, as set out below:

Empty Cohorts	4	3	2	1	Total
1FE Primary	£36,250	£29,500	£22,750	£15,500	£104,000

The SEN Unit will be funded in line with other SEND resource provision/units within Cheshire West and Chester which are funded through a combination of place funding and pupil specific top-up funding, in line with DfE High Needs Operational Guidance.

Each agreed commissioned place generates £6,000, which is paid whether the place is filled or not, ensuring the school can maintain the specialist staffing and stability required for the provision. Please note however, this arrangement may be subject to change following the recent publication of the SEN Reform White Paper with further information expected from the DfE over 2027 and 2028. The Council will liaise with the trust on this once further information is available.

For each pupil on roll, this £6,000* is supplemented by top-up funding based on their assessed level of need; in Cheshire West and Chester for 2024–25 this is set at £7,125 for Band B and £11,062 for Band C. Top-up funding follows the pupil and is designed to reflect the level of support required to meet the outcomes in their EHCP.

Minimum Viability Number

Your budget planning should reflect the fact that it takes time for local housing development(s) to be completed and occupied so the free school may be undersubscribed in its opening years.

Although the Council wishes to limit the PAN initially to 15 and increase this in line with growth on the development, we recognise the challenges related to opening a new school including financial pressures.

To ensure a minimum level of per-pupil funding during the first three years of opening, the Council will fund the school based upon a minimum viability number (MVN) for each year group agreed with the successful academy trust. A MVN of 15 would be used.

Opening year: funding for a minimum of 15 Reception pupils, 15 Year 1 pupils and 15 Year 2 pupils

Second year of opening: funding for a minimum of 15 Reception, 15 Year 1 pupils, 15 Year 2 pupils and 15 Year 3 pupils;

Third year: funding for a minimum of 15 Reception pupils, 15 Year 1 pupils, 15 Year 2 pupils, 15 Year 3 pupils and 15 Year 4 pupils.

The successful Trust will be expected to organise the class teaching in a manner that is efficient, ensuring that there are sufficient places to accommodate new families moving onto the development, but not in such a manner that is unsustainable for the trust or the pupils.

Trusts should consider mixed class teaching where appropriate, taking into consideration statutory requirements such as infant class size legislation.

In addition, your application form (Annex B – or Appendix 4) must include:

- a separate 3-year budget plan that models expenditure and income to demonstrate that “as the school grows” there are “affordable staffing structures and sensible phasing plans” Guidance can be found at Mainstream free school revenue funding - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Section G - Impact and Equalities Assessments

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

Cheshire West and Chester Council conducted an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the proposal to open the new primary school and the full draft assessment can be found in Appendix 6. We will continue to monitor this should any negative impacts be identified. The outcome of the EQIA advised there will be more places available to meet the demand for places in the Ellesmere Port West Planning Area. With the additional housing development on Ledsham Road, families on the new estate will be able to attend their local school provision and not have to travel distances to school. The positive impacts have been identified as:

- Ensures there are sufficient primary school places for children and families in the Ellesmere Port West Planning Area which are accessible and available for pupils.
- Ensures there will be increased local SEND provision.
- Ensures that there is sufficient local provision to meet the need of new local housing.
- Careful consideration has been given to any impact that the new school may have on other local primary schools in the Ellesmere Port West Planning Area. The new primary school will initially open in September 2028 at 0.5FE with a restricted PAN of 15 places offered in Reception, 15 places in Year 1 and 15 places in Year 2. The school will then grow year on year as the housing development expands and the houses are occupied. This phased approach will ensure that there are not too many primary school places in Ellesmere Port West and will prevent any negative impact on existing schools within the area.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of local schools

Appendix 2 – Early Years additional information

Appendix 3 – SEND provision additional information

Appendix 4 - Application form for proposers

Appendix 5 – Model criteria

Appendix 6 – Draft Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)