

School Organisation Consultation

Expansion of The Abbey School

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. Will the planned works disrupt the children's education?
2. How long will the proposed expansion take?
3. With greater numbers of students, will the school lose its current caring ethos where the staff really know and understand each and every student, their individual strengths and support needs?
4. Will the expansion include provision for students post-16?
5. How will any additional home-school transport and other vehicles be accommodated?
6. Will the building work be noisy?
7. What will happen to the playing fields and outdoor space?

*These questions are answered
in the following pages.*

*We will add responses to additional FAQs
as they emerge.*



1. Will the planned works disrupt the children's education?

The building works will be phased in such a way that priority will be given to constructing additional capacity before taking existing facilities out of use for redevelopment. There will be no need to reduce or revise any of the existing provision for our students.

The school has already maximised and optimised what can be offered to students with the facilities currently available and is reaching the stage where the only thing constraining the introduction of initiatives and additional opportunities for our existing students is lack of space and resources; our existing students will benefit as much, if not more so, than any additional students from the proposed expansion.

Being part of this plan offers The Abbey a fantastic opportunity that will increase curriculum breadth and curriculum provision for our students enormously. Facilities will be greatly improved, with the construction of new classrooms, specialist teaching areas and sports facilities. Extra-curricular activities will be able to develop, as will the range of subjects that our students can study. There will be increased opportunities for staff progression and development, enabling us to recruit and retain high quality staff.

We know that some of our students sometimes find the prospect of change makes them anxious. Our staff are all well aware of this; they have the skills to support students in building resilience which will also help them manage their emotions when they inevitably encounter periods of disruption in later life. The students are being fully involved in the process including a school assembly to introduce them to the proposals; staff are answering their questions and listening to their suggestions already. In fact, on the very day of the launch of the expansion consultation, Mr Moore was studying the plans and elevations on display in the foyer with students as part of a Maths lesson!

2. How long will the proposed expansion take?

All key stakeholders have been invited to share their views in an expansion consultation that will run for four weeks finishing on Friday 2nd July at 12pm.

Should this lead to approval from the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), it is hoped that works will begin around January 2022, possibly sooner, subject to the necessary planning consents being granted.

In terms of expansion in student numbers, the proposal is for the school to become three-form entry, and for an additional Year 7 class with 12 pupils to be taken on roll each September over a five-year period. The school would reach full capacity by September 2025.

3. With greater numbers of students, will the school lose its current caring ethos where the staff really know and understand each and every student and their needs?

Maintaining our current school culture, ethos and character is at the top of the list of priorities and we will continue to provide our students with the best possible Abbey School experience throughout this process and beyond.

The increase in numbers of students will be very gradual, just a dozen each year for 5 years so the overall increase will be modest, too. At the proposed full capacity in 2025 of around 170 students, The Abbey will still be a relatively small, specialist school.

With expansion in student numbers will come additional staff numbers so the teacher to student and teaching assistant to student ratios will remain high, as they are now.

Additional facilities/resources and numbers of specialist practitioners will make it possible to provide even more specialised and individual therapy, counselling, etc opportunities and tailored academic interventions.

4. Will the expansion include provision for post-16?

Students thrive at The Abbey surrounded by peers who all have learning difficulties like them and many of whom have additional needs and personal challenges in common too, as well as the support of teaching professionals, therapists, etc who know and understand them. Under these conditions, they start to close the gap, their progress and achievement accelerates and their self-confidence soars. Parents past and present tell us they believe that their young people would move even closer to achieving their full potential if they could stay at the school until the age of 18 before moving onto further education, training or employment.

Although there are no provisions for a 6th form or similar within the scope of the expansion proposals currently under consultation for the existing school, with a larger student body it is increasingly likely that a critical mass of students needing such provision will be identified and addressed in the future. The school expansion proposed has been future-proofed so as not to preclude potential synergistic development in the future.

5. How will any additional home-school transport and other vehicles be accommodated?

Obviously, the overall size of the site is finite, however, there will be a space gain resulting from the demolition of the bungalow, which is now surplus to requirements following the retirement of the school caretaker and the introduction of new premises management solutions.

We make no apology for prioritising the provision of improved teaching, learning and other opportunities for our students above the provision of parking spaces which in most cases are in use for less than an hour per day. Other schools face the same dilemma and most have resorted to restricting access to essential vehicles only.

The number of home-school transport vehicles and parents/carers dropping off and picking up their own children varies from year to year determined by the prevailing LA transport policy and the needs profile of the cohort of students.

A number of measures have already been put in place to relieve pressure at the start and the end of the school day including both a before and after school club for parents who want to drop their children off early or collect them a bit later to avoid peak times.

The safety of all – students, parents/carers/staff/visitors – is of paramount importance and will not be compromised under any circumstances. A full risk assessment review will be undertaken including for the duration of the construction phase of the project.

6. Will the building work be noisy?

There will inevitably be some noise associated with the proposed building works but, because many of our students have sensory needs including sensitivity to noise, all contractors will be required to manage their operations so as to minimise this.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the safety of students and staff, the risk assessment for the project will include restricted time slots for any vehicle/plant movements and delivery of materials.

7. What will happen to the playing fields and outdoor space?

Although it will be necessary to absorb the apron around the existing building and use some of the lower field as a site for the new sports hall and block, the large site can readily absorb the development proposed without compromising the extensive outdoor facilities including outdoor classroom, full size football pitch/athletics field, basketball court, playgrounds and sensory garden