

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENT OF A PILOT SPECIALIST RESOURCE BASE (SRB) FOR LEARNERS WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH (SEMH) NEEDS

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 10th June

1. PURPOSE:

1.1. The proposal responds to a clearly identified insufficiency in local Additional Learning Provision (ALP), particularly for learners with complex autism and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs who cannot be supported within current school or SRB model. Cabinet approval is sought to establish a new Specialist Resource Base (SRB) with a therapeutic environment for learners with complex SEMH needs at the former Ysgol Y Fenni site, and to approve the associated capital and revenue costs.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1. Support the strategic direction to expand local specialist provision and reduce reliance on costly out-of-county placements.
- 2.2. Approve the establishment of a SEMH Specialist Resource Base at the Ysgol Y Fenni site from September 2026.
- 2.3. Approve the capital costs required to adapt the site as set out in section 7.
- 2.4. Agree to set aside the disposal of the Ysgol Y Fenni site for a period of 5 years to enable the development of the site as base for this pilot SRB provision, which will enable a determination of the suitability and feasibility of the site for this provision in the longer term.
- 2.5. Note the staffing and ongoing revenue implications associated with the provision.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1. Growing demand and insufficiency of provision

SEMH needs now represent a significant proportion of ALN, with increasing complexity and co-occurring needs such as autism and communication difficulties. Almost a quarter of current statutory plans (individual development plans) relate to SEMH, with increasing numbers of primary-aged learners affected. This need can present itself in dysregulated behaviours and can be challenging in mainstream environments. Existing provision does not meet rising demand, as highlighted in the 2025 Estyn report.

3.2. Rising exclusions and risk

Over the course of the last five years Monmouthshire has seen a continued rise in levels of behaviour of distress linked to trauma and neurodivergence within both mainstream and specialist provisions. Concerningly there have been significant increases in primary exclusions and pupils at risk of permanent exclusion that require additional support, either from their school or from services provided from the wider education directorate. In discussions with

Headteachers it has become apparent that there are growing safeguarding and risk management concerns in mainstream settings.

3.3. High-cost and ineffective current arrangements

It is our strategic aim and ambition that nearly all of our learners learn and participate in mainstream schools. However, we recognise that for some learners there will be times when time away from a mainstream setting may be beneficial to reset expectations and set a clear understanding of parameters of school life. The children that this provision would be established for are children who are currently receiving their education through a mixture of bespoke interventions, often away from school and a cohort of peers. These learners are often not in school-like environments and lack appropriate peer groups and therefore appropriate social/ language/ learning models.

The evidence shows that many pupils do not successfully reintegrate into mainstream after external provision. Furthermore, there are limited, appropriate alternative provisions for primary aged learners with SEMH needs and in some instances, there have been breakdowns in the provisions already secured. Individual alternative provision placements, when they are secured, are very costly and often lack long-term impact. Currently, the ALN Bespoke alternative provision for individual learners' costs are £1,020,000 for 2025-26.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

4.1. An assessment of potential options to address the identified insufficiency in SEMH additional learning provision has been undertaken across the Inclusion Service. This has considered delivery models, site availability and ability to meet statutory duties within required timescales.

4.2. Option 1 – Maintain Current Arrangements

Continue to meet need through existing arrangements, including ALN Bespoke packages reliant on alternative provision and out-of-county placements.

Assessment – This approach:

- does not provide appropriate or sustainable provision for learners with complex SEMH needs
- relies on high-cost, fragmented provision that is continuing to increase
- does not support reintegration or access to suitable peer groups and learning environments
- carries increasing safeguarding and operational risks due to behaviours of distress
- places significant pressure on Inclusion services and external providers and is not aligned with our Inclusion Strategy
- presents a clear risk of non-compliance with statutory duties under the ALN Act

Conclusion - This option is not sustainable, does not meet statutory requirements, and presents unacceptable financial, operational and safeguarding risk. It is not a viable option.

4.3. Option 2 – Establish SRB Provision at Ysgol Y Fenni (Preferred Option)

Develop a dedicated SRB to meet the needs of learners with SEMH needs on the soon to be vacant Ysgol Y Fenni site, providing a therapeutic, specialist learning environment.

Assessment - This option:

- directly addresses the identified insufficiency in SEMH provision and responds to Estyn findings
- enables delivery within required timescales (September 2026) to meet urgent demand
- makes effective use of an available LA asset requiring minimal adaptation (circa £92k) with costs that can be met from ALN grant funding
- reduces reliance on high-cost external provision and out-of-county placements
- provides appropriate therapeutic environments, including secure indoor and outdoor space
- supports improved outcomes, reintegration and sustainable local provision

Conclusion - This is the only option that is deliverable, compliant and capable of meeting current and projected need within required timescales.

4.4. Option 3 – Distributed Provision within Existing Mainstream Schools

Establish smaller SEMH provisions within existing primary schools across the county.

Assessment - Detailed feasibility work has been undertaken across a range of schools. This has confirmed:

- No suitable sites are currently available within the existing estate that can safely accommodate this cohort
- significant safeguarding, operational and environmental constraints within mainstream settings
- insufficient access to appropriate outdoor and therapeutic space
- requirement for substantial capital investment with limited long-term suitability
- likely impact on host schools, including leadership capacity, performance outcomes and community confidence

Conclusion - This option is not deliverable in practice due to site constraints, safety considerations and impact on mainstream provision. No viable alternative school-based sites have been identified.

4.5. Option 4 – New Build Specialist Provision

Develop a purpose-built SEMH specialist provision as a long-term solution.

Assessment - This option:

- would require identification and acquisition of a suitable site (none currently available)
- is not included within the current capital programme
- would involve significant lead-in time (multiple years)
- would not address immediate need for the 2026–27 cohort
- would require continued reliance on costly interim provision

Conclusion - Whilst this may form part of a long-term strategic ambition, it is not a viable option to meet current demand or statutory requirements within required timescales.

5. PROPOSED SOLUTION:

5.1. It is proposed that Monmouthshire establishes a dedicated SRB for primary aged pupils with SEMH needs (option 2). This option is recommended as it:

- meets statutory requirements
 - addresses immediate and future demand
 - is deliverable within required timescales
 - represents the most effective and efficient use of available resources
- 5.2. This SRB would have a specific and different designation to the other, current SRBs whose focus is on learners whose learning is at least three years below their chronological age, or have specifically identified needs. This SRB will provide:
- Small group, therapeutic support
 - Low sensory, specialist environment
 - Access to outdoor and wellbeing spaces
 - A sustainable, provision run by Monmouthshire staff enhancing the LA's capacity to provide sufficient additional learning provision for younger learners presenting with complex SEMH needs.
- 5.3. The new SRB will be centrally managed by the Inclusion Service via the Pupil Referral Service (PRS), enabling targeted placements and reintegration pathways. The utilisation of the former Y Fenni school building allows rapid implementation and cost-effective delivery. In the initial phase of its establishment the management and oversight of the provision will be through the corporate team allowing greater oversight and opportunities for evaluation for the authority.

6. REASONS:

The proposal is driven by statutory, financial and educational imperatives:

- 6.1. It secures our statutory duty: The ALN Act requires the authority to keep under review and address insufficiencies in additional learning provision.
- 6.2. It promotes improved educational outcomes: Current arrangements do not provide appropriate environments for learning, wellbeing or promote reintegration for to mainstream learning settings
- 6.3. It secures safeguarding: Increasing complexity and risk requires specialist environments and skilled staff.
- 6.4. Promotes sustainability: Current reliance on external provision is financially and operationally unsustainable.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

7.1. All resource implications are being met from within existing and available budget, as detailed below:

7.2. Capital costs

Building adaptations estimated at £92,315 (within £300k ringfenced ALN capital funding for 2026/27).

Additional minor costs for furnishings, sensory space, resources and equipment.

7.3. Revenue costs

Staffing: £110,000 for additional staffing (teacher and teaching assistants) provided within the agreed budget for 2026/27.

Interim costs: For this first five months of this financial year there will be a £503,234 cost for the continuation of ALN Bespoke provision until the opening of the provision.

7.4. Costs associated with the non-disposal of the Y Fenni site

In June 2022 Full Council determined that it wished to progress the development of the new King Henry VIII all-through school. As a part of that decision, it was resolved that the site of the Y Fenni school should be disposed of when the school was relocated to its new site (the former Deri View Building). This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to set aside that disposal for a period of 5 years to allow a full and proper assessment of the provision and its continuing need.

7.5. Ongoing building costs:

Approx. £90,000 per annum (utilities, maintenance, cleaning).

7.6. Financial benefits

Reduced reliance on:

- External Alternative Provision providers (£1.0 m projected annually).
- Out-of-county and independent placements (£2.1m)

7.7. This cost avoidance, instigated through an "invest to save" model of local capacity building will not negate the need for provision, but it will be more cost effective and within our control and direction.

8. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

8.1. Equalities: Improves access to appropriate education for vulnerable learners with SEMH and neurodivergent needs

8.2. Safeguarding: Provides safer, controlled environments for pupils presenting with high-risk behaviours

8.3. Wellbeing: Supports mental health, emotional regulation and engagement in learning

8.4. Sustainability: Reduces travel and reliance on distant placements

8.5. Corporate parenting: Strengthens provision for the most vulnerable learners, including those at risk of exclusion

The proposal aligns with long-term prevention, early intervention and inclusion principles.

9. CONSULTEES:

- MCC Inclusion Service including the Educational Psychology Service and Education Support Team
- Cysgod Y Coed (PRS) Senior Leadership Team and Management Committee
- Head of Landlord Services
- CLSE Directorate Management Team
- MCC Senior Leadership Team
- MCC Cabinet

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- CLSE DMT Paper, Spring 2025 - Inclusion Service Summary re: the need for more sufficient provision for learners presenting with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.
- Business Cabinet Paper, December 2025 - Proposal for SEMH Provision
- Business Cabinet Paper, February 2026 - Update on Proposal for SEMH Provision
- Business Cabinet Paper, May 2026 – Update on costs to adapt Ysgol Y Fenni to develop a specialist resource base (SRB) for learners with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.
- Estyn Report, February 2026

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