



Establishment of Specialist Inclusion Base at Dowdales School, Dalton. Consultation Proposal

What is the Consultation about?

Demand for specialist provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has increased substantially over recent years.

Westmorland and Furness Council have a strategy that aims to secure access to a high-quality continuum of provision for all children and young people, enabling the majority of children and young people with additional needs to access local provision, with appropriate capacity and resources to meet need. The continuum comprises of various SEND elements including Resourced Provision within mainstream schools.

Specialist Inclusion Bases are a designated area or facility within a mainstream school that enables support to be provided to pupils with specific types of special educational needs. Such provisions allow pupils to access mainstream education whilst also having access to specialised support and resources tailored to their needs.

The Council has identified a number of schools that have the potential to host Specialist Inclusion Bases and is now consulting on a proposal to establish such a provision at Dowdales School with effect from January 2027.

The Proposal

The Local Authority is consulting on a proposal to establish a Specialist Inclusion Base. It is proposed that the provision will have a designation of Social Emotional Mental Health with flexibility for Autistic Spectrum Condition and provide up to 15 places for pupils aged 11-16 years. The provision will be established with effect from January 2027. It is intended that numbers in the Specialist Inclusion Base will be phased in as appropriate subject to the completion of planned capital works at the school to enable it to accommodate this new provision.

Places will be allocated at the provision by the Local Authority when the provision is named in a pupil's Education, Health and Care Plan.

The provision will be accommodated within the existing school building. If this school organisation proposal is approved, then a capital project will be completed to reconfigure and refurbish an existing space within the school. It is hoped that the final construction of the accommodation will be completed in the 2027/28 academic year.

Who is this consultation for?

This consultation is aimed at parents, staff and governors of Dowdales School and anyone else with an interest, or stake in education in the area.



Background

Nationally, demand for specialist provision for children and young people with SEND has increased substantially over recent years. In Westmorland and Furness there has been a significant increase in the number of children and young people with special educational needs (SEND), including a 72% increase over the last 10 years in those children receiving an Education, Health and Care Plan. Whilst many of these children and young people will have their needs met in mainstream education provision, for some, additional specialist support is needed if they are to achieve their potential.

Following the publication of its Education Sufficiency Strategy in the summer of 2024, the Local Authority determined that it needed to increase its offer of specialist provision in response to this growing demand. Analysis was undertaken regarding the demand for provision by both type and location to inform the development of this offer.

The Local Authority's Education Sufficiency Strategy aims to ensure availability of a high-quality continuum of provision for all children and young people, enabling the majority of children and young people with additional needs to access local provision, with appropriate capacity and resources to meet need.

In early 2026, the Department for Education published its Every Child Achieving and Thriving Schools White Paper. Westmorland and Furness Local Authority has responded to these developments with a plan that clearly sets out our intentions following the publication of our Education Sufficiency Strategy and also addresses the new context provided by the Department for Education within the Schools White Paper.

This proposal focuses on the establishment of a new Specialist Inclusion Base and is one of a number of proposals that will be published for consultation during 2026. Specialist Inclusion Bases are a designated area or facility within a mainstream school that enables support to be provided to pupils with specific types of special educational need. Such provisions allow pupils to access mainstream classes whilst also having access to specialised support and resources tailored to their needs.

The consultation seeks to develop new SEND provision via a phased process. This will ensure that the school can operate a designated Specialist Inclusion Base and access relevant funding and support from the Local Authority. In the first phase, up to six students will be able to access the Specialist Inclusion Base following a minor refurbishment programme. After this a more significant capital project of refurbishment to utilise existing accommodation at the school will be undertaken to enable the school to host 15 pupils within this provision.

Have your say

The consultation will run from 29 June 2026 – 26 July 2026.

Anyone interested in submitting their views can do so by completing the online questionnaire (or completing the attached form), or by emailing your comments to the School Organisation Team as below.

It is not possible to respond to individual correspondence, but all points raised during the consultation process will be taken into account before any decisions are taken.

There will also be an opportunity to attend a meeting to be held at the school to ask any questions.

There will be separate meetings for the staff/governors and parents/stakeholders as detailed below.

Monday, 29 June 2026 in the Dining Room at Dowdales School:

- Student Council: 3pm - 4pm
- Governors and Staff: 4pm – 5pm
- Parents & Stakeholders: 5:15pm – 6:15pm

What happens next?

At the end of the consultation, Westmorland and Furness Council's Cabinet will consider the response to the consultation and decide whether or not to publish formal notice of the proposal. If notice of the proposal is published, then this will trigger a further four-week representation period during which all stakeholders will have another opportunity to comment on the proposal.

At the end of the representation period the Local Authority must decide on the proposal, taking into account the feedback received during the representation period.

If the proposal is approved, it is likely that the change would be implemented from January 2027.

Where can I find out more information about this proposal?

You can find out more information by following the attached link to the documents that are available on the Council's website.

www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-organisation

Consultation on the proposal to develop a Specialist Inclusion Base at Dowdales School

1. Please indicate your relationship to the school (tick all boxes that apply)

I am a

Parent/carer of a child at Dowdales School

☐

Member of staff at Dowdales School

☐

Governor at Dowdales School

☐

Pupil at Dowdales School

☐

Other

☐

If other has been selected, please specify

2. Please use the space below to include your comments about the proposal.

Name (please print)

Address (incl. postcode)

Please return by email to: **School.Organisation.WAF@Cumbria.gov.uk** or by post to:
School Organisation, Westmorland and Furness Council, PO Box No. 304, Kendal.
LA9 4GY

